



**HOW TO READ**

# FOUCAULT

Johanna Oksala

## HOW TO READ

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JOHANNA OKSALA

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## SERIES EDITOR'S FOREWORD

### How am I to read *How to Read*?

This series is based on a very simple, but novel idea. Most beginners' guides to great thinkers and writers offer either potted biographies or condensed summaries of their major works, or perhaps even both. *How to Read*, by contrast, brings the reader face-to-face with the writing itself in the company of an expert guide. Its starting point is that in order to get close to what a writer is all about, you have to get close to the words they actually use and be shown how to read those words.

Every book in the series is in a way a masterclass in reading. Each author has selected ten or so short extracts from a writer's work and looks at them in detail as a way of revealing their central ideas and thereby opening doors on to a whole world of thought. Sometimes these extracts are arranged chronologically to give a sense of a thinker's development over time, sometimes not. The books are not merely compilations of a thinker's most famous passages, their 'greatest hits', but rather they offer a series of clues or keys that will enable readers to go on and make discoveries of their own. In addition to the texts and readings, each book provides a short biographical chronology and suggestions for further reading, Internet resources, and so on. The books in the *How to Read* series don't claim to tell you all you need to know about Freud, Nietzsche and Darwin, or indeed Shakespeare and the Marquis de Sade, but they do offer the best starting point for further exploration.

Unlike the available second-hand versions of the minds that have shaped our intellectual, cultural, religious, political and scientific landscape, *How to Read* offers a refreshing set of first-hand encounters with those minds. Our hope is that these books will, by turn, instruct, intrigue, embolden, encourage and delight.

Simon Critchley  
New School for Social Research, New York

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## INTRODUCTION

Michel Foucault (1926–84) was a philosopher of extraordinary talent, a political activist, social theorist, cultural critic, creative historian, professor at the most prestigious academic institution in France, and a world-famous intellectual who irreversibly shaped the ways in which we think today. His critical project continues to inspire scholars, artists and political activists to find unprecedented ways of constructing new forms of thinking as well as of smashing up old certainties – or, as they often turn out to be, comforting illusions.

Foucault conceived of his books as a toolbox that readers could rummage through to find a tool they needed to think and act with. Operating these tools, however, can involve difficult questions of interpretation, in that the use of a tool is always determined by the context, and ultimately by the goal of our work. A rock can be used equally effectively for hammering and for smashing a window. To get closer to Foucault's intent, it helps if one is willing to question the ingrained social order, give up all truths firmly fixed in stone, whilst holding on to a fragile commitment to freedom.

The controversies that keep circulating around Foucault's work are partly because it can be used in many different ways. Its originality and appeal lie in its multifaceted nature. It does not provide a single theory or doctrine, but rather offers a diverse body of thought that consists of various analyses that are specific to the set of issues at hand. Imaginative and new uses of his toolbox are essential goals when reading his work.

It is nevertheless possible to find unifying strands in this multifaceted corpus without reducing it to a single theory or methodology. Freedom was a guiding question for Foucault throughout his philosophical career. His domain of study was social practices: his whole thought can be mapped out as studies of different aspects of practices. The methodological features of his thought, namely his innovative use of historiography as a philosophical method, also give his work a uniform and highly original character. Foucault was a philosopher who used history to understand contemporary society in order to change it in the direction of greater freedom.

Foucault, along with influential thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Julia Kristeva, is usually classified as a post-structuralist, although he refused the label and claimed that he did not even understand what it meant. He nevertheless belongs to the generation of French thinkers who came to prominence in the 1960s after the exhaustion of existentialism. Existentialism and its most famous representatives – Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Simone de Beauvoir – promoted the view of philosophy primarily as the study of the human being: his or her nature, the meaning of human existence and the limits of its possibilities. Post-structuralism, on the other hand, was characterized by the denial of the human being as the privileged object of philosophical analysis, focusing instead on the social, linguistic and unconscious determinants of thought. While Sartre had been the unrivalled king of French philosophy up to the 1960s, Foucault and Derrida took his place in the decades that followed.

The post-structuralists perceived the exhaustion of existentialism as a crisis of philosophical inquiry, and more generally of its traditional methods. The thinking subject had been the foundation of philosophical knowledge since Descartes and his famous cogito argument – I think, therefore I am. Given the failure of existentialism to account for the way that language constructs reality, the post-structuralists judged that subject-centred philosophy had come to an end. To revive philosophy,

radically new approaches were required. While Derrida developed his project of deconstruction that focused on textual criticism of philosophical writings, Foucault turned to history.

He welded together philosophy and history in a novel way that resulted in an astounding critique of modernity. He called his works 'histories of the present', and he attempted to chart the historical development as well as the conceptual underpinnings of some key practices in modern culture – such as the practices of punishing and treating those perceived to be mad. The studies show the historically contingent and haphazard nature of these practices, and their effect is a profound estrangement: the reader suddenly sees aspects of his or her culture that he or she previously took for granted as curious and contingent, but also and significantly as intolerable and in need of change.

Foucault's work is customarily divided into three distinct phases. The first phase, when he called his historical studies archaeologies, is usually situated in the 1960s: the main works of this period include *History of Madness* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), *The Order of Things* (1966) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). The genealogical phase – genealogy being the favoured term for Foucault's studies of power – was in the 1970s, and encompasses his most widely read books *Discipline and Punish* (1975) and *The History of Sexuality*, volume 1 (1976). The final, ethical phase, when Foucault turned to ancient ethics, was in the 1980s and produced the last two volumes of *The History of Sexuality: The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self* (1984). While such a tripartite schema undoubtedly makes it easier for beginners to come to grips with Foucault's large oeuvre, it is important to treat it as a heuristic or pedagogical model and not as a strict division. The three phases do not refer to three different methods or objects of study. The introduction of a 'new' phase was rather marked by the introduction of a new axis of analysis that resulted in a more comprehensive view.

Beyond inspiring heated discussions among professional academics concerning the different ways of reading and interpreting

his work, Foucault's thought has fed controversies in cultural debates on a more general level. His idea of productive power – power that produces and incites rather than represses and censors forms of experience and knowledge – has provided valuable tools for challenging conservative political views on sexuality, gender, delinquency and mental illness. His thought has been an important source of intellectual and political inspiration for many gay activists as well as for other cultural radicals.

Writing critical books on topics such as madness, sexuality and prison would probably be enough to create an aura of subversion and controversy around a thinker. It is his private life that perhaps stirred up the most violent storms, however. People who have never read or even seen a single book by him often know about the sensational aspects of his private life: he was a homosexual who died of AIDS, he experimented with different drugs and sadomasochistic sexual practices, he spent a while in a mental institution during his youth, and he liked to speed around in a Jaguar. It has been argued that these kinds of 'self-destructive limit experiences'<sup>1</sup> provide a key to answering the question of how to read his work. The problem with 'reading his life' is, however, that unlike his books, it does not provide us with any determinate text. All we have is an infinite array of fleeting events, contradictory accounts and memories, in addition to the private thoughts and experiences that can never be accessed or interpreted.

I have chosen largely to ignore the little I know about Foucault's life. This is not because I think it is irrelevant or uninteresting: if we read him with the attention he deserves it should become apparent how his work also incorporates his life. The life of a philosopher is to be found in the philosophical ethos of his or her books, and for those of us who did not know Foucault personally, perhaps this is the only way to discover it. Foucault himself observed, on the connections between work and life, that 'the private life of an individual, his sexual preferences, and his work are interrelated not because his work translates his sexual

life, but because the work includes the whole life as well as the text.'<sup>2</sup>

Foucault's thought, similar to his life, defies categorization under a single motif. This is not because he often failed and therefore changed his mind, but rather because he pursued questions that do not have definite and final answers. For him, philosophy was not a body of knowledge that accumulated, it was rather a critical practice that relentlessly questioned dogmatic beliefs and intolerable practices in contemporary society. He invited us to continue this critical practice: we should read him for no lesser reason than in order to change the world.

## THE FREEDOM OF PHILOSOPHY

What is on trial is not only a social system in general, with its exclusions and condemnations, but all the provocations – deliberate and personified – thanks to which the system functions and ensures its order, thanks to which it manufactures those it excludes and condemns in accordance with a policy, the policy of Power, the police and the administration. A certain number of people are directly and personally responsible for the death of this prisoner.<sup>3</sup>

*Suicides de prison*

I would say also, about the work of an intellectual, that it is fruitful in a certain way to describe that-which-is by making it appear as something that might not be, or that might not be as it is. Which is why this designation or description of the real never has a prescriptive value of the kind, 'because this is, that will be'. It is also why, in my opinion, recourse to history . . . is meaningful to the extent that history serves to show how that-which-is has not always been; i.e., that the things that seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances, during the course of a precarious and fragile history. What reason perceives as its necessity, or rather, what different forms of rationality offer as their necessary being, can perfectly well be shown to have a history; and the network of contingencies from which it

emerges can be traced. Which is not to say, however, that these forms of rationality were irrational. It means that they reside on the base of human practice and human history; and that since these things have been made, they can be unmade, as long as we know how it was that they were made.<sup>4</sup>

'Critical Theory/Intellectual History'

The first extract is from a pamphlet published jointly by three organizations working towards prison reform in France in 1973. They were concerned with the dramatic increase of suicides in prisons and the pamphlet documents the thirty-two cases that occurred in 1972: one quarter of the suicides were immigrants, and the majority were in their twenties. Foucault was the founding member of one of the organizations, the GIP, Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons (Prison Information Group), and the unsigned commentary following the report was almost certainly written by him.<sup>5</sup> Its tone is polemical and accusatory. These were not suicides that merely happened in prison. They were suicides caused by the prison system, and particular people were directly and personally responsible for the deaths.

The second extract is from an interview conducted by Gérard Raulet and published in 1983. Raulet asked Foucault the question that he himself had posed several times, which for Foucault was the key question of philosophy: what is the nature of the present? In his response to this question, Foucault's understanding of philosophy as opening up a space for freedom unfolds. The role of the intellectual is to expose new ways of thinking: to make people see the world around them in a different light, to disturb their mental habits and to invite them to demand and instigate change. The intellectual is not the moral conscience of society, his or her role is not to pass political judgements, but to liberate us by making alternative ways of thinking possible.

The contrast between the two texts is stark and illustrates the tension between Foucault's roles as an engaged political activist on the one hand, and a detached philosopher on the other. This

tension is also reflected in the reception of his work. It is sometimes critically noted that Foucault's political activism was not founded on a coherent theoretical position and that no truly effective politics emerges from it. Conversely, his philosophical position is judged to be uncritical and politically empty because it refrains from explicit political judgements.

Yet what has made Foucault's thought original and appealing to many people is exactly the novel way he conceived of the role of philosophy and its relationship to politics. Rather than being a universal intellectual, who spoke for others and made moral and political judgements in the name of such supposedly universal values as justice and freedom, Foucault saw himself as a specific intellectual. This meant that he could speak out and engage in political struggles only from his own specific position within the practices of power. His philosophical studies, on the other hand, could not make specific political judgements, but only provide conceptual tools for people to use in their particular struggles. While for Foucault the political activist it was important to demand concrete improvements to prison conditions – the prisoners should be able to read in their cells and prisons should have heating in the winter, for example – Foucault the philosopher wanted to ask more fundamental questions. Why does our society punish people by sending them to prison? Is this the only way that they can be punished? How does the prison operate? What is a delinquent? These questions are not unrelated to the political judgements and demands, however, but must underlie them.

The critical impact of Foucault's philosophy is not based on the explicit judgements he makes, but rather on the approach that he adopted to analysing our culture. While science and much of philosophy aim to decipher from among the confusion of events and experiences that which is necessary and can be articulated as universal law, Foucault's thought moves in exactly the opposite direction. He attempted to find among the necessities that which upon closer philosophical scrutiny turned out to

be contingent, fleeting and arbitrary. For Foucault, the aim of philosophy is to question the ways in which we think, live and relate to other people and to ourselves in order to show how that-which-is could be otherwise.

Understanding philosophy in this way opens up a space of freedom: it exposes new possibilities of thinking, perceiving and living. By showing how the things that we take for granted and assume to be necessities have in fact emerged out of a network of contingent human practices, philosophy makes possible not only thought experiments and idle speculations, but concrete change: transforming ways of life, power relations and identities. Foucault compared our predicament to standing in a line because we could not see that there was lots of empty space around us. Instead of trying to organize the line into a different configuration that better reflected the true nature of human existence or reality, he attempted to show us the empty space around us.

An effective way of questioning the inevitability of our current practices is to trace their history. History can teach us that many of the things that we now hold as self-evident – such as the prison – have in fact emerged fairly recently and as a result of contingent events and circumstances. Almost all of Foucault's books are historical studies, from the early *History of Madness* to his last published works, the second and third volumes of *The History of Sexuality*. While a lot has been written on whether he was a philosopher or a historian, it is clear at least that his histories do not represent conventional historiography. He called his studies archaeologies and genealogies to distinguish them and noted that they were a philosophical exercise rather than the work of a historian. The aim was 'to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and enable it to think differently'.<sup>6</sup> The aim of Foucault's history of the prison, *Discipline and Punish*, for example, is not just to understand the historical development of the prison, but to free our thought from the idea that this form of

punishing is inevitable and thereby make it possible to imagine alternatives to it.

Historicization is thus not an end in itself and it is not irrelevant what is historicized. What Foucault historicizes is always seemingly timeless and inevitable facts. He targets objects the meaning and validity of which are affected by revealing their historicity. History is not just educational and interesting, nor is the aim to increase our knowledge about the past. The point is to understand ourselves in order to be able to think and live differently. The study of history is essentially a tool that enables us to change ourselves and the world in which we live. As Foucault noted in the extract with which this chapter begins, history was meaningful to him to the extent that it served to show how 'that-which-is has not always been' and how 'the things that seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances, during the course of a precarious and fragile history'. This is the meaning of Foucault's often repeated characterization of his books as 'histories of the present'. His histories are not about the past, they are about us, today, and they represent an attempt to show not only how we have become what we are, but also how we could become something else.

Foucault's histories do not only target the inevitability and immutability of things, but also importantly their natural character. His books *History of Madness* and *The History of Sexuality* were milestone attempts to denaturalize: to show how phenomena such as insanity and sexuality that were assumed to be natural, biological facts were actually formed in the course of human history and culture. In this sense, Foucault is clearly a social constructivist. Social constructivism refers to forms of thought arguing that human beings and their experiences are the result of social, not natural processes. Such theories have been extremely influential in the latter half of the twentieth century and their power has resided in exactly the effort to destabilize necessities and essentialist forms of thinking. They generally presuppose that what has been constructed has up until then been

assumed to be natural and taken for granted. The reason for arguing that something is socially constructed – learning difficulties, violent behaviour, IQ, gender or race – is generally to show that by changing the social and political order of things, this something could also be changed. It is identified as a political question: its existence and value can be debated and it can be radically transformed or at least modified.

Showing that something is socially constructed as opposed to being biological is also a way of questioning all purely medical explanations of human behaviour. A powerful example is homosexuality. In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault showed how the scientific explanations of homosexuality as pathology emerged in the nineteenth century. The medical approach to it dominated in our culture for a long time: homosexuality was removed from the mental illness category of the American Psychiatric Association, for example, as late as 1974. Foucault insisted that 'homosexual' was not a name that referred to a natural kind of being. It was a historical and cultural construction that emerged in the nineteenth century and was produced by specific scientific discourses and power relations. Social constructivist approaches to sexuality, Foucault's *History of Sexuality* being arguably one of the most important, have been crucial in bringing about a shift in thinking about homosexuality.

Foucault explicitly confirmed the essential and constitutive role of social practices on numerous occasions, and singled them out as the constant object of his studies. During his archaeological phase in the 1960s he mainly focused on the discursive practices of science and the regularities immanent in them. By identifying the rules and constraints of scientific practices he attempted to show how domains of knowledge, such as biology and linguistics, and their objects, life and language, emerged in the history of thought. In his genealogical phase in the 1970s Foucault studied practices of power and the forms of knowledge that supported them: how the development of criminal psychiatry, for example, made possible the power of doctors over

delinquents. In the last phase of his thought he studied how people were able to shape themselves through ethical practices and exercises that he called techniques of the self.

While Foucault's essential objects of analysis were social practices, he did not claim that everything was socially constructed the way that cars are produced in a factory. To say that homosexuality did not exist before certain scientific practices and historical developments made it possible is not to say that certain actions and sensations that we now associate with it did not exist: it means that they were formed as an object of scientific analysis – objectified – in different ways in different historical practices. At one time certain actions and sensations were objectified as mental illness, at another they were conceived as a mortal sin, for example. Scientific practices and the rules regulating them make it possible for some entities to appear as objects of scientific research only at certain times and under certain conditions.

The way in which certain actions and sensations are scientifically objectified has an enormous influence on their subjects, however, and therefore on those very actions and sensations. If someone is classified as mentally ill because they sexually desire a member of their own sex, for example, this classification inevitably influences the way they behave and think about themselves. Being told by a scientific expert that one's desire is pathological is going to be a powerful incentive to attempt to alter it.

It is often noted that Foucault restricted his analysis to the human sciences because the objects and truths generated in them had constitutive effects on the subjects under study. The way botanists classify plants has no effect on how plants 'behave', but in the case of human beings as scientists devise new objects, classifications and categories they generate types of people, and also types of actions and sensations. Categories of people come into existence at the same time as the people who fit into them. There is a two-way, dynamic interaction between these processes.<sup>7</sup>

Practices thus constitute social reality in complex and entangled ways: they constitute both objects of knowledge – such as homosexuality – as well as subjects who are known as homosexuals and who behave and act according to that knowledge. This looping effect is what Foucault means when he argues that relations of power and forms of knowledge create subjects. He attempted to understand and describe, through his historical studies, the processes in which different kinds of subjects were constructed: how the identities 'delinquent' or 'homosexual', for example, emerged as supposedly natural, scientific classifications.

This approach to the subject amounted to a critique of 'philosophies of the subject', which in the context of French intellectual circles in the 1960s meant an explicit attack on phenomenology and existentialism. The primacy of the subject had found a powerful expression in Immanuel Kant's radical idea that all knowledge of the world had to conform to human faculties of knowing. To understand the ultimate structures of reality we cannot access and study the world itself as it is, but only the human way of experiencing it. This idea was developed further by the phenomenologists – Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger in Germany and their followers Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty in France. The central claim of phenomenology was that the starting point of all philosophical inquiry, as well as of all theories of science, was the first-person, lived experience of the subject. The abstract theories and objective structures of philosophy and science were based on a more fundamental level that alone made them possible, namely the subject's first-person experience of reality.

It is this 'philosophy of the subject' that Foucault wanted to challenge through his focus on practices. He was interested in fundamental but historically changing practices, categories, concepts and structures of thought in terms of which people are able to think, perceive and act in certain ways, and he claimed that these historical conditions of experience could not be revealed by analysing the individual experiences that they made possible.

We cannot understand homosexuality solely by analysing the first-person experiences of those labelled homosexual, for example. Rather, we have to study the homophobic power relations operative in the society, the culturally specific views and scientific theories that circulated about it, as well as the concrete practices of punishment and cure. All these different axes construct the subjective experience of a homosexual, but could not themselves be revealed through it in any transparent manner.

Foucault's archaeologies and genealogies are thus explicit efforts to rethink the subject. The subject is not an autonomous and transparent source of knowledge, but is constructed in networks of social practices which always incorporate power relations and exclusions. Foucault characterised his work as a genealogy of the modern subject: a history of how people are constructed as different types of subjects – as delinquents, homosexuals, mentally ill, or, through such exclusions, as normal and healthy. Such a history is essentially linked to political struggles: it is possible to contest and ultimately transform oppressive and degrading identities when they are exposed as social constructions rather than expressions of natural facts. In other words, 'since these things have been made, they can be unmade, as long as we know how it was that they were made.'

## REASON AND MADNESS

A new object appeared in the imaginary landscape of the Renaissance, and it was not long before it occupied a privileged place there: this was the Ship of Fools, a strange drunken boat that wound its way down the wide, slow-moving rivers of the Rhineland and round the canals of Flanders.

The *Narrenschiff* is clearly a literary invention, and was probably borrowed from the ancient cycle of the Argonauts that had recently been given a new lease of life among mythological themes, and in the States of Burgundy at least now had an institutional function. Such ships were a literary commonplace, with a crew of imaginary heroes, moral models or carefully defined social types set out on a great symbolic voyage that brought them, if not fortune, at the very least the figure of their destiny or of their truth . . .

But among these satirical and novelistic ships, the *Narrenschiff* alone had a genuine existence, for they really did exist, these boats that drifted from one town to another with their senseless cargo. An itinerant existence was often the lot of the mad. It was common practice for towns to banish them from inside the city walls, leaving them to run wild in the distant countryside or entrusting them to the care of travelling merchants or pilgrims. The custom was most common in Germany. In Nuremberg during the first half of the fourteenth century the

presence of sixty-two madmen was recorded, and thirty-one were chased out of town. There were twenty-one more enforced departures over the fifty years that followed, and this was merely for madmen arrested by the municipal authorities. They were often entrusted to the care of the river boatmen. In Frankfurt in 1399, boatmen were given the task of ridding the city of a madman who walked around naked, and in the earliest years of the following century a criminal madman was expelled in the same manner from Mainz. Sometimes the boatmen put these difficult passengers back ashore earlier than they had promised: one Frankfurt blacksmith returned twice from being expelled in such a manner, before being definitely escorted to Kreuznach. The arrival in the great cities of Europe of these ships of fools must have been quite a common sight . . .

Locked in the ship from which he could not escape, the madman was handed over to the thousand-armed river, to the sea where all paths cross, and the great uncertainty that surrounds all things. A prisoner in the midst of the ultimate freedom, on the most open road of all, chained solidly to the infinite crossroads. He is the Passenger *par excellence*, the prisoner of the passage. It is not known where he will land, and when he lands, he knows not whence he came. His truth and his home are the barren wasteland between two lands that can never be his own.<sup>8</sup>

*History of Madness*

Foucault once noted that all of his books were born from and directly related to his own personal experiences: 'I haven't written a single book that was not inspired, at least partly, by a direct, personal experience.'<sup>9</sup> While studying philosophy in the highly prestigious and competitive École Normale Supérieure in Paris in the 1950s, he was also systematically studying the history of psychology and psychiatry. In connection with this research he worked for over two years as an unofficial intern in the Hôpital Sainte-Anne, one of the largest psychiatric hospitals in France at the time. This gave him the opportunity to observe not only the

patients, but also the ways in which they were treated by the staff. Foucault later recollected that his personal experience of the treatment of the insane had left a strong impression on him, and his response to this experience took the form of historical criticism.<sup>10</sup>

All of Foucault's early published texts deal with psychiatry and mental illness in different ways. His first publications comprised a long introduction to the French translation of the German psychiatrist Ludwig Binswanger's essay 'Dream and Existence' (1954) and the monograph *Mental Illness and Psychology* (1954). It was in *History of Madness*, however, that he developed his own distinctive approach.

Existentialist phenomenology formed the unsurpassable intellectual horizon of every aspiring philosopher in the Paris of the 1950s. Prior to *History of Madness*, Foucault's published works were strongly influenced by existential phenomenology, which was his point of departure. He argued in the first edition of *Maladie mentale et personnalité*, for example, that in order to understand mental illness we have to take into account the lived experience of the patient, we need 'a phenomenology of mental illness'. The second edition, published in 1962, was extensively rewritten and reflects Foucault's revised views of mental illness that he put forth in *History of Madness* in 1961: we need a historical study of the varying cultural experiences of madness in order to understand it.

In these intervening years Foucault's thought took a significant turn from the lived experience to a broader historical and political analysis of its preconditions. *History of Madness* marks the beginning of the effort to question the philosophical status of the rational, autonomous and constituting subject. It is also the first of his histories of the present.

The Ship of Fools has become the famous emblem of the book. This powerful image of a boat with its 'senseless cargo' gliding the free, open rivers of Renaissance Europe forms the backdrop against which the central argument about the

confinement of the mad is projected. Foucault's historical claim in this book is that the treatment of the mad abruptly and dramatically changed within a few years during the seventeenth century. From being banned from cities and left to lead a relatively free existence, they were confined in houses of detention. The scale of this confinement was unprecedented: in Paris alone, within several months, more than one out of every hundred inhabitants was locked up.

This historical event, marked by the founding of the Hôpital Général in Paris in 1656, functions as an illustration of the larger, philosophical claim put forward in the book. Foucault argues that during the middle of the seventeenth century the way madness was conceptualized underwent a profound change. It was conceptualized as falling outside of what was essentially human and became linked with the need for confinement, an idea that still, to a large extent, prevails today and is taken for granted.

During the Renaissance, madness had been understood as an integral part of everyday life. The madmen were expelled from cities, but there was no attempt to completely erase madness from human existence and society. The madmen were excluded, but not socially feared or persecuted. On the contrary it was acknowledged that madness embodied a special kind of wisdom about the human condition. Foucault refers to Cervantes and Shakespeare's treatment of their mad characters: their mad heroes speak in the tragic voice of conscience, human finitude and desperate passion. (HM, 35–8.)

During the classical period, corresponding roughly to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, madness was locked up and moved out of sight. It was present in everyday life only as the opposite of human reason, and only 'behind bars'. 'When it manifested itself it was at a careful distance, under the watchful eye of a reason that denied all kinship with it, and felt quite unthreatened by any hint of resemblance' (HM, 145). Madness was no longer conceived of as integral to human existence and as being in dialogue with reason: it was excluded by and opposed to

what was rational and essentially human. The mad were thus not only physically confined in isolated institutions and excluded from society, they were also conceptually excluded from the realm of reason and humanity.

Madness was also increasingly conceived of within a moral framework. It was rejected and condemned because it violated the work ethic of the classical age. The houses of confinement were inhabited not only by the mad, but also by people who, to us, would appear to belong to essentially different categories: the poor, the unemployed, sexual offenders, those guilty of religious profanation, and free thinkers. What they had in common was their idleness and therefore moral deviance. In the classical experience their behaviour was conceptualized as a violation of morality and as representing the underside of reason.

The next major change in the history of madness took place in the late eighteenth century and marked the birth of the psychiatric asylum. Foucault questions the prevalent view in the history of psychiatry in the 1960s that the great Enlightenment reformers – such as Samuel Tuke in England and Philippe Pinel in France – instigated the humane and enlightened treatment of the mad because they finally understood that madness was an illness and not a moral defect. According to the traditional accounts, they ‘liberated’ the insane by severing them from the company of criminals and by recognizing the true nature of their madness as mental illness. Foucault argued that Pinel and Tuke had become legendary figures in the history of psychiatry, and that their significance was accepted without question, but beneath these humane myths there was a series of operations that organized the world of the psychiatric asylum and the methods of cure according to the same principles of fear, confinement and moral condemnation that prevailed in the classical age.

External constraints on the body, such as chains and bars, were replaced by more subtle mechanisms of punishment that targeted the mind. This made the confinement only more total: while in the classical age the madmen had been in chains, at least their

minds had been given free rein. In the new model the madman is a patient and his every thought and action is placed under the all-encompassing authority of psychiatric knowledge. Cures, moral therapies, religious education and work took the place of violent coercion and functioned through the dynamics of guilt, conscience and self-restraint. As Foucault wrote, ‘Madness was no longer to strike fear into people’s hearts, nor would it be able to – it was itself to *be afraid*, helpless, irrevocably afraid, entirely in thrall to the pedagogy of good sense, truth and morality’ (HM, 483).

The allegedly greater humanity of Pinel and Tuke was, in fact, the correlate of the moral values of their bourgeois society, and the ‘liberation’ of the insane meant imprisoning them under its strict moral rules. They rejected the idea of madness as a challenge to the limits of conventionality and as an alternative mode of human existence. Instead, the patients in Tuke’s asylum were made to practise the social etiquette that was appropriate to English tea parties: they played the guests while the staff would play their hosts. For Foucault, this farce exemplified the imprisonment of madness in a bourgeois, moral world that was far deeper than confinement by chains and bars.

These historical claims about the treatment of the insane would not have the provocative and explosive edge that Foucault’s histories of the present essentially do if they were only curiosities of a distant past. Although Foucault was studying the different historical practices of treating the mad – such as exclusion, confinement and cure – what he was attempting to describe through such a study was how certain cultural experiences and attitudes to madness emerged, and how some of their essential elements are still present in our experience. He calls into question our conceited conception of the inevitable truth and greater humanity of our understanding of madness as mental illness by showing, on the one hand, the historical emergence of our psychiatric practices from practices of confinement, and, on the other, the possible and alternative forms in which madness has

existed in the past: not as a pathology and an object of scientific inquiry, but as strongly tied to forms of artistic expression as well as being part of everyday life. As Foucault's discussion of the Renaissance showed, madness had been an indispensable dimension of what it was to be human: it had resided 'in the hearts of men and at the heart of things' (HM, 42).

To sum up the aim of the book, *History of Madness* attempted to denaturalize madness by historicizing it: madness should be understood as a variable social construct, not as an ahistorical scientific given. 'Madness only exists in a society' was how Foucault summed up the main argument in the book, 'it does not exist outside of the forms of sensibility that isolate it and the forms of repulsion that expel it or capture it.'<sup>11</sup> Madness understood as mental illness is a historically contingent, social construction that originated in the nineteenth century.

Foucault's *History of Madness* has been read in two different ways. Initially it was read as a purely academic study belonging to the French tradition of the history of science. While some professional historians praised its importance, it was also severely criticized for its historical inaccuracy. It was argued that there were many mistakes in Foucault's periodization: historical evidence shows that the mad were already confined in the Renaissance, for example. Some historians called attention to the fact that the idea of madness as illness dated back to ancient medicine and is not the consequence of the modern medicalization of madness.

The other reading focuses on the book's broader interpretative claims and not the historical details. The book is admired for its profound influence in the wider sphere of social movements and discussions on the role of insanity in our culture. Foucault was rightfully heralded as a pioneer of the idea of the social construction of insanity, as well as the founder of a new history of psychiatry. His view of mental illness as a social construction struck a strong cord in the emerging movement of alternative psychiatry in the 1960s, which fundamentally challenged the

theory and practice of mainstream psychiatry at the time. Anti-psychiatry became quickly associated with the general counterculture movement of the 1960s and early 1970s opposing the power of oppressive institutions. This was the time when the novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* became a bestseller and Foucault's views clearly resonated with public concern about treating patients with forced medication, lobotomy and electroshock procedures.

The literary style of the book suggests that the larger audience, rather than professional historians, was the one that Foucault had in mind when he was writing it. Although it is stunningly rich in historical detail, it is not written in the dry, academic language of historiographical scholarship. It reads like literature. As the extract at the beginning of this chapter shows, it is teeming with metaphors and lyrical allusions: thousand-armed rivers, unknown lands and untamed seas. Some of Foucault's critics have suggested that the intricate and highly poetic language acts as a veil designed to confuse the reader and hide the historical flaws, but I would argue that the form of expression adds weight to Foucault's central aims. If the object of Foucault's histories is to describe forms of experience, they should also, and just as importantly, evoke an experience in the reader. The book engages with not only our rational faculties of argument, but also our faculties of imagination and emotion. It conveys to us something about madness – an experience that lies on the other side of the limits of reason – and this something cannot be expressed in the rational language of philosophy. Foucault insisted that rather than writing the history of the language of psychiatry, which was 'a monologue by reason about madness', he wanted to 'draw up the archaeology' of the silence of madness (HM, xxviii).

To answer the obvious question of how the silence of madness could be written, Foucault turned to literature. He noted that what interested and guided him in writing the book was certain traces of madness present in literature (DE, 196). Only a certain

style of literary writing could show traces of madness, and evoke an experience in the reader capable of challenging the idolization of reason. In *History of Madness* Foucault takes up names such as Hölderlin, Nerval, Nietzsche and Artaud as examples of writers who have managed to show the silence of madness in their writing, but he does not explore the nature of literary language in detail in the book. We have to wait for the series of essays and articles on literature published in the following years.

Foucault once noted in an interview that, while there were truth books and demonstration books, his books were experience books. By this he meant that the experience of reading potentially changed the reader and prevented him from 'always being the same or from having the same relation with things and with others' (IMF, 246). His aim was that his books should work towards a transformation, and, to a small degree, be agents of it. He wrote in order to share 'an experience of what we are, not only our past but also our present, an experience of our modernity in such a way that we might come out of it transformed' (IMF, 242). In his *History of Madness*, his aim was ultimately to change the way in which we perceive the people we judge to be insane, and this cannot be done by rational arguments alone.

## 3

## THE DEATH OF MAN

In distinguishing between the epistemological level of knowledge (or scientific consciousness) and the archaeological level of knowledge, I am aware that I am advancing in a direction that is fraught with difficulty. Can one speak of science and its history (and therefore of its conditions of existence, its changes, the errors it has perpetrated, the sudden advances that have set it off on a new course) without reference to the scientist himself – and I am speaking not merely of the concrete individual represented by a proper name, but of his work and the particular form of his thought? Can a valid history of science be attempted that would retrace from beginning to end the whole spontaneous movement of an anonymous body of knowledge? Is it legitimate, is it even useful, to replace the traditional 'X thought that ...' by 'it was known that ...'? But this is not exactly what I set out to do. I do not wish to deny the validity of intellectual biographies, or the possibility of a history of theories, concepts, or themes. It is simply that I wonder whether such descriptions are themselves enough, whether they do justice to the immense density of scientific discourse, whether there do not exist, outside their customary boundaries, systems of regularities that have a decisive role in the history of the sciences. I should like to know whether the subjects responsible for scientific discourse are not determined in their situation, their function, their perceptive

capacity, and their practical possibilities by conditions that dominate and even overwhelm them. In short, I have tried to explore the scientific discourse not from the point of view of the individuals who are speaking, nor from the point of view of the formal structures of what they are saying, but from the point of view of the rules that come into play in the very existence of such discourse: what conditions did Linnaeus (or Petty, or Arnauld) have to fulfil, not to make his discourse coherent and true in general, but to give it, at the time when it was written and accepted, value and practical application as scientific discourse – or, more exactly, as naturalist, economist, or grammatical discourse?<sup>12</sup>

*The Order of Things*

*The Order of Things*, published in 1966, was an instant bestseller that made Foucault famous. The first printing of it sold out within a week. It is in many ways Foucault's most demanding book, almost impenetrably rich in layers and details and intricate in design. It contains profound philosophical arguments spanning the work of diverse thinkers such as Descartes, Comte and Sade, and contributes to the history of science by offering new insights into topics as varied as the work of obscure Renaissance naturalists and nineteenth-century theories of linguistics. These erudite and detailed arguments about philosophy and the history of science blend with beautiful descriptions and elegant discussions of literature and painting.

Not surprisingly, differing interpretations of the work abound. The book is sometimes read as a failed effort to construct a structuralist approach to historiography, and at other times as a confusing formal exercise. The extract that I have chosen, Foucault's foreword to the English translation added four years later, could be read as a desperate effort on his part to correct misconceptions. He strongly argues against structuralist readings of the book, and refers to 'certain half-witted commentators' who persisted in labelling him a structuralist (OT, xiv).

Structuralism refers to a set of influential theoretical standpoints that was prevalent in France in the 1960s, the main aim being to explain social and cultural phenomena in terms of underlying unconscious structures. It was non-historical, and in this respect stood in direct opposition to Foucault's approach.

Foucault's major claim in *The Order of Things* is, nevertheless, a 'structural' one insofar as it is a claim about unconscious structures of thought. He argues that there is a level of order, 'a positive unconscious of knowledge', that eludes the consciousness of scientists and yet is formative of scientific discourse. This is the archaeological level of knowledge as opposed to the epistemological level he refers to at the beginning of the extract, and it sets out the organizing principles of knowledge, the unconscious structures that order scientific discourses. Although individual scientists never formulated these principles, nor were they even aware of them at the time, the archaeological level of knowledge nevertheless defines the objects proper to their study: it constitutes the necessary conditions for forming concepts and building theories.

If we wish to understand why the idea of evolution, for example, was impossible for centuries, it is not enough only to attempt to understand the genius of Darwin. We must understand the underlying structures of thought that formed the context of his thinking. Foucault argues that the idea of evolution only became thinkable because of a more profound shift in thought holding that objects of empirical knowledge were susceptible to time. It was possible to conceptualize life as connected to historical development once empirical objects were not defined any more by their place in a timeless system of classification, but by their place in history. This more profound change in the conceptual framework could not be instigated by any individual scientist alone, but was rather a result of a multiplicity of complex causes that Foucault does not even attempt to enumerate. He wanted to study the history of science as a relatively autonomous field of discursive unities, regularities and

transformations without positing the intentional subject – the scientist – as the principal explanatory factor. His aim was not to provide causal explanations for changes in history, but only to describe certain transformations in the deep structures of thought.

Foucault had used the archaeology metaphor in different contexts in his early works, and he began to use it systematically as a name for his approach in his books *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1963), *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences* (1966) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969). The term archaeology had already been used as a methodological metaphor by supporters of the two movements in the study of history in France that influenced Foucault most profoundly: French historical epistemology, whose best-known representatives were Gaston Bachelard and Georges Canguilhem, and the 'new history' of the Annales school, a school of historiography that became dominant after World War II. Despite many differences, both of these movements shared a focus on discontinuities, the rejection of narrative historiography, and the critical awareness that historical research was always partly constructing its subject matter. They no longer accepted the received, self-evident periodizations based on events such as treaties and battles, but sought new kinds of events and new ways of organizing series of events by considering longer time spans and more subtle ruptures, transformations and diversities.

The notion of archaeology effectively captures the main features of Foucault's approach to the history of science, and highlights where it differs from traditional historiography. He was more interested in strata of problems than in individual achievements, which reflects the meaning of archaeology in the conventional sense. His archaeology is not biographical history, and it does not concern the individual discoveries of great men. Rather it digs down deep into the soil of our thought to define larger timescales and the more general modes of thinking that lie

behind individuals' diverse opinions and actions. It distinguishes between different levels of analysis in the history of science and penetrates the strata beneath individual observations, experiments and theories.

Hence, beyond the level of scientific discoveries, discussions, theories and philosophical views exists an archaeological level of thought that forms them. Foucault's objective in *The Order of Things* was to reveal this formative level of scientific discourse, and he invented the concept of the episteme (*épistémè*) to refer to it. By revealing the constraints on and the conditions necessary to the existence of the thought of a particular period, he sought to reveal the non-subjective conditions that made subjective experiences of order and knowledge possible. Describing history in terms of epistemes was first and foremost an attempt to show that the history of thought could not be understood only by studying the thought of individuals. We must understand the larger historical and epistemic conditions that have made it possible for individual subjects to think and perceive the world around them in certain ways and through certain concepts, and also how certain ways of thinking were simply impossible.

This approach to the history of thought is now generally accepted: it is seldom presented any more as a succession of great thinkers who pushed thought forward by the sole genius of their minds. *The Order of Things* was at the forefront of the radical move towards adopting a wider perspective to the history of thought, one of the book's least controversial and most widely credited features. What was highly controversial, however, was Foucault's way of describing fundamental breaks or discontinuities in the Western history of thought. He locates the points of discontinuity by distinguishing the epistemic systems underlying three historical epochs: the Renaissance, the classical age and modernity. The division is the same as in *History of Madness*. The first break or discontinuity in his archaeological inquiry positions the dawning of the classical age roughly halfway through the seventeenth century. He put the second epistemic break at the

beginning of the nineteenth century, which he believed heralded the dawn of the modern age.

By documenting breaks or discontinuities between the *epistemes*, Foucault was arguing against the continuous development of European science and rationality. His point, from the perspective of the history of science, was to show how modern forms of knowledge originated from a fundamental break in the history of thought and were not simply more advanced developments of previous modes of knowledge. Certain controversies and oppositions, which had been traditionally regarded as fundamental by historians, were in fact part of the same epistemic order. On the other hand, men who had been commonly understood as predecessors of modern thinkers were in some cases, despite some superficial similarities, operating in a whole different theoretical framework.

To take the example of Darwin again, it is often held that Lamarck anticipated Darwin's evolutionary ideas. Foucault argues in *The Order of Things*, that although Lamarck wrote about species changing over time, his thought was nevertheless constrained by the episteme of the classical age and relied on a wholly different understanding of nature. In the classical episteme, nature was only conceivable as a unified, ahistorical table, and the changes that Lamarck studied were shifts of the whole system towards a higher state of perfection. This idea was fundamentally different from the modern concept of life understood as a historical, dynamic phenomenon.

Similarly, the scientific discoveries of Lamarck were not simply improvements on previous Renaissance theories, but originated from a fundamental break with them. They 'did not become possible because men looked harder and more closely', but because the mode of being of the natural order had changed (OT, 131-2). In the Renaissance, nature was understood as a dynamic, living organism and the method for acquiring knowledge about it was to interpret the hidden meanings it contained. In the classical age, on the other hand, the natural world

consisted of meaningless matter and mechanical movement and to know it meant to order and classify it. As the historian Paul Veyne, a close friend and a colleague at the Collège de France, described the way in which Foucault revolutionized history, he approached the past not as a narrative with a humanly meaningful plot, but as if he were looking at it through a kaleidoscope containing a number of discrete fragments. It revealed a pattern, but one shaped by chance. To move from one episteme to another was to turn the kaleidoscope and to create a new pattern.<sup>13</sup>

Foucault's stakes are also high in the philosophical arena. His aim was no less than to show how all previous philosophy was flawed, and then to give it new direction and impetus. *The Order of Things* was his most pronounced attack on philosophies of the subject – forms of thought that gave primacy to the study of human existence – and it contains his most explicit and vehement criticism of phenomenology. His grand claim was that philosophical thought had been trapped in the paradoxical predicament of the modern episteme and had therefore arrived at a dead end. He consciously and provocatively imitated Friedrich Nietzsche's famous statement about the death of God, and announced the death of man. Just as Nietzsche heralded the death of God as promising philosophical thought a new beginning, Foucault followed him in heralding the death of man as an event important enough to inaugurate a new episteme: 'The void left by man's disappearance' is 'the unfolding of a space in which it is once more possible to think' (OT, 342).

For Foucault, man refers to a human being, but a human being only in so far as he is understood in a certain way, in a way that was not possible in the classical age, for example. He calls man an 'empirico-transcendental doublet'. By this he means that man is a being who is the transcendental condition of all knowledge – all knowledge of the world has to conform to the human way of experiencing it – and at the same time man is a being in the world that can be empirically studied and known. He is

autonomous and rational, and at the same time he is the product of unconscious forces and cultural practices beyond his control. He is formed by a complex network of social practices and historical events, and yet his experience is the possibility of their elucidation.

Foucault claims that this form of thought is by no means necessary or unproblematic. Although it is difficult for us to conceive of any other way of thinking about the relationships between the subject, knowledge and history, Foucault diagnoses man as the problem of the modern episteme. A mode of thought that centres on man – a human being as both the source of meaning as well as the outcome of the natural world, human culture and history – necessarily remains ambiguous and circular. Philosophies of the subject, such as phenomenology, can only show how 'what is given in experience and what renders experience possible correspond to one another in an endless oscillation' (OT, 336).

For Foucault, the possibilities for thinking opened up by the death of man were connected with a new understanding of language. The birth of man was possible because of the collapse of the classical episteme, but we were again on the brink of a new episteme. The question of language had become the most important question confronting us. 'The whole curiosity of our thought now resides in the question: What is language, how can we find a way round it in order to make it appear in itself, in all its plenitude?' (OT, 306). This question heralded a new episteme. Foucault suggested that it was in the analysis of language as something more fundamental than man that the new possibilities for thought lay. Rather than language being only an instrument that we use to translate our experiences into words, the experiences themselves are formed by the ways they are conceptualized in language.

The realization that language is fundamentally constitutive of our experiences of the world is often called the linguistic turn in philosophy. The core idea is that language forms the necessary

limits of our thought and experience: we can only experience something that language makes intelligible for us. Because we do not have words for describing the different shades of snow that Eskimos have, for example, we do not distinguish them in our experience either.

In emphasizing the importance of language over man, Foucault is thus arguing that a fundamental reversal in the landscape of our thought has taken place. Philosophical thought now sees the analysis of language rather than of human experience as the most fundamental for understanding the nature of reality. Even if Foucault's book or post-structuralism as a whole did not inaugurate a new episteme, it played a major role in giving form to the linguistic turn in philosophy – one of the most important developments in Western philosophy during the twentieth century.

The emphasis on anonymous structures rather than individuals makes it difficult, however, to assess the influence of the book and of Foucault as an individual thinker. In an interview following the publication of *The Order of Things* Foucault explained his position as the author of it. He claimed that it should be understood as anonymous because he too was situated inside his own episteme. The book belonged to the historically specific form of discourse that had brought the question of language to the forefront of our thought. He self-consciously placed his analysis in the general anonymity of all the investigations that were at the time revolving around language. The author is 'present in the whole book, but it is the anonymous "one" who speaks today in everything that is said'.<sup>14</sup>

While stressing his anonymity, the book nevertheless begins with a first-person account of a transformative experience, a form of writing Foucault rarely used. He opens the book by describing how it arose out of a passage in an essay by Jorge Luis Borges – an Argentine writer and one of the foremost literary figures of the twentieth century. Borges quoted 'a certain Chinese encyclopaedia', which presents an entirely different

system of thought to ours by dividing animals into categories such as belonging to the emperor, embalmed, fabulous and stray dogs. The passage made Foucault laugh for a long time and the experience shattered all the familiar landmarks of his thought – our thought, ‘the thought that bears the stamp of our age’ (OT, xv). It was in wonderment at this strange taxonomy that the shattering impossibility of thinking in certain ways forced Foucault to question the limits of his own thought.

This humorous beginning points towards the aim of the book. Even if we are inevitably trapped inside our own episteme, it is nevertheless possible, to a certain extent, to become aware of its limits. It is against the background of what is entirely different that the unconscious structures of our own thought can show up. Foucault clearly intended his own historical descriptions of scientific theories and classifications in *The Order of Things* to function like Borges’s Chinese encyclopaedia: they are meant to make us realize that there are hidden structures underneath our own order of things and to experience their fragility.

When we read about the Renaissance naturalist Aldrovandi’s book *Historia serpentum et draconum*, for example, the experience is almost as disorienting as reading the Chinese encyclopaedia. One of the chapters in Aldrovandi’s study on snakes is arranged under headings that include their anatomy, nature and habits, but also mythology, the gods to which they are dedicated, dreams, and the use of snakes in the human diet (OT, 39). By distancing the reader from his or her own culture, Foucault aimed to show how forms of thought that now appear impossible were not only possible but also reasonable forms of knowledge for those thinking in terms of another episteme. This means that our present forms of thought might appear just as ridiculous and impossible from the vantage point of the future. Our necessities could equally well turn out to be nothing but contingencies.

Although seldom recognized, *The Order of Things* is not only an attempt to develop an alternative to subject-centred

approaches to philosophy and the history of thought. It also comprises a part of Foucault’s histories of the present: the aim is not simply to understand the past, but in addition to undergo an experience that challenges the self-evidence of our own modes of thought.

## THE ANONYMITY OF LITERATURE

The author allows a limitation of the cancerous and dangerous proliferation of significations within a world where one is thrifty not only with one's resources and riches, but also with one's discourses and their significations. The author is the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning. As a result, we must entirely reverse the traditional idea of the author. We are accustomed, as we saw earlier, to saying that the author is the genial creator of a work in which he deposits, with infinite wealth and generosity, an inexhaustible world of significations. We are used to thinking that the author is so different from all other men, and so transcendent with regard to all languages that, as soon as he speaks, meaning begins to proliferate, to proliferate indefinitely.

The truth is quite the contrary: the author is not an indefinite source of significations which fill a work; the author does not precede the works; he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction. In fact, if we are accustomed to presenting the author as a genius, as a perpetual surging of invention, it is because, in reality, we make him function in exactly the opposite fashion . . . The author is therefore the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning.

In saying this, I seem to call for a form of culture in which fiction would not be limited by the figure of the author. It would be pure romanticism, however, to imagine a culture in which the fictive would operate in an absolutely free state, in which fiction would be put at the disposal of everyone and would develop without passing through something like a necessary or constraining figure. Although, since the eighteenth century, the author has played the role of the regulator of the fictive, a role quite characteristic of our era of industrial and bourgeois society, of individualism and private property, still, given the historical modifications that are taking place, it does not seem necessary that the author function remain constant in form, complexity or even in existence. I think that, as our society changes, at the very moment when it is in the process of changing, the author function will disappear, and in such a manner that fiction and its polysemous texts will once again function according to another mode, but still with a system of constraints – one which will no longer be the author, but which will have to be determined or, perhaps, experienced.

All discourses, whatever their status, form, value, and whatever treatment to which they will be subjected, would then develop in the anonymity of a murmur. We would no longer hear the questions that have been rehashed for so long: Who really spoke? Is it really someone else? With what authenticity or originality? And what part of his deepest self did he express in his discourse? Instead, there would be other questions, like these: What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject functions? And behind all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an indifference: What difference does it make who is speaking?<sup>15</sup>

'What Is an Author?'

Jean-Paul Sartre, the leading philosopher of the postwar generation in France, wrote a collection of essays in 1948 entitled, *What Is Literature?* He answers his own question unequivocally: the starting point, the guiding principle as well as the ultimate aim of literature is freedom. The author must guide the thoughts of the readers towards the oppressed of the world and describe the world as in need of ever greater freedom. This commitment to freedom on the part of the author is a condition of good literature. A good novel is always a demand to become aware of oppression, and a commitment to end it by standing up for freedom.<sup>16</sup>

It is against the background of Sartre's view that we are better able to understand the novelty of Foucault's ideas about the role of the author and the relationship between literature and freedom. For Foucault and the generation following Sartre, the idea that literary writing had dissociated itself from the dimension of individual expression became paramount. In opposition to Sartre and the prevailing views on literature, they argued that literary writing referred only to itself, and the intentions of the writer were irrelevant to how it should be evaluated and read. Literary works were not determined by the commitments, motives and intentions of the meaning-bestowing author. Whether the writer was committed to freedom or not, for example, was irrelevant to the value of the work itself. It is somewhat ironic that if Sartre's message was to free ourselves, it was Sartre – along with everything that he represented to the young Foucault – from whom Foucault wanted to free himself.

As well as studying the history of thought and the functioning of scientific practices, Foucault's inquiry into discourse in the 1960s developed in another significant direction – namely literature – and he published several influential essays on the subject. He was briefly associated with the writers grouped around the literature magazine *Tel quel*, and his early thought conformed in many ways to the ideas of the influential movement that gave a revolutionary role to avant-garde writing. This movement

included famous thinkers such as Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes.

Foucault's essays on literature complement his studies in the history of science by examining the relationship between the individual subject and language from another angle. The individual subject is now the literary author rather than the scientist, but Foucault's aim again is to the question the primacy of his or her intentions and experiences in our analysis of discourse. We should attempt to understand the meaning, value and functioning of the discourses themselves and not ask what goes on in the head of those who wrote them. The philosophical and literary dimensions of Foucault's work became thoroughly intertwined.

Foucault's starting point in his definitive essay 'What Is an Author?' is the claim that the author has died – the writer's intentions can no longer function as the ultimate source of the meaning and value of the work. Instead we must analyse how his or her name functions in organizing discourses. Foucault argued that the name of the author was not a proper name like any other. The name performs certain unique functions with regard to narrative fiction: it permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them with others, for example. If we were to discover that Shakespeare was not born in the house in which we thought he was born, it would not affect the way we read his works. If we discover that a manuscript was written by Shakespeare and not by Bacon, on the other hand, this discovery immediately affects the way in which we read, evaluate and classify it.

There are only certain discourses in our culture that are endowed with such an 'author function', while others are deprived of it. A private letter or a contract may have a signer, but it does not have an author. An anonymous text written on the wall has a writer – but not an author. The author function is characteristic of only certain discourses within our society, and these discourses have changed in the course of history. There were times when literary works – stories and epics – were

accepted and valued without any questions about the identity of their authors. On the other hand, texts that we would now call scientific, dealing with cosmology and medicine, for example, were accepted in the Middle Ages only when marked with the name of their distinguished author. Since then a complete reversal has occurred: scientific discourses are now accepted not because of their author's name, but because of the anonymous and redemonstrable character of their truth. Literary discourses, on the other hand, have come to be accepted only when endowed with an author. Unlike scientific discourses, their meaning, status and value depend on the question of who wrote them. To be the author of a literary work in our culture thus not only means having produced it, it also means fulfilling a specific function in relation to it that is historically and culturally determined.

Obviously, the death of the author does not mean that there are no subjects writing books with their pens or on their computers. Rather, far from being the ultimate origin of the meaning and value of literary works, the author is a contingent principle of their classification and organization. The apparently natural way in which he or she has been accorded ultimate power over the meaning of literary works is in no way inevitable: it is specific to this historical period.

In Foucault's view, the role of the author, in this historical age, is not only a contingency, but also a constraint. We read works of literature and philosophy to find out what their authors meant in composing them. According to Foucault, this is problematic. It prevents literature from being read in radically novel ways unconstrained by such considerations. The name of the author not only organizes the work in a certain way but also limits, excludes and chooses. It is the means by which the free circulation, manipulation, composition, decomposition and recomposition of fiction is impeded. Although there will never be completely free circulation of texts, the modes of constraint are historically changing, and it is therefore possible that one day we might live in a culture

in which we are not limited by the figure of the author, but rather surrounded by an anonymous murmur, an endless proliferation of meanings. Today, in the age of the Internet, Foucault's vision seems strikingly prophetic.

Foucault's fascination with the ability of language to produce meanings independently of the initiatives of the writing subject is also apparent in his only book-length study of literature, *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel*. This book is usually left out of the canon of Foucault's major works. Unlike these it is not a history and it is generally not read as explicating his philosophical position. Yet Foucault was clearly interested in Roussel because of the philosophical implications of his work, which experimented with the nature of language.<sup>17</sup>

In writing some of his books, Roussel used a method he described in his posthumous work, *Comment j'ai écrit certains de mes livres* (*How I Wrote Certain of My Books*). The method was based on homonyms – words that are either spelt or pronounced in the same way, but have different meanings. An example would be the word 'stalk': it can mean either a part of a plant or to follow someone around. Roussel would use homonyms by selecting a word and linking it to another with the proposition *à*, and these two words, understood in another way than in their original meaning, provided him with a new creation or character. The phrase *maison à espagnolettes*, for example, ordinarily means a house with window latches, but Roussel used it as a basis for an episode about a royal family or dynasty descended from a pair of Spanish twin girls – its second meaning.

He also experimented with the second type of homonym – words that are pronounced in the same way but spelt differently, such as 'two' and 'too'. He would transform a common phrase, a song or a line of poetry into a series of words with similar sounds. These new words would be homonymous to the initial words but obviously totally heterogeneous among themselves. The name and address of Roussel's shoemaker, Hellstern, 5 Place Vendôme, would turn into the sentence *Hélice tourne zinc plat se*

*rend dome* because it is pronounced the same way. It means something completely different, however, namely 'propeller turns zinc flat becomes dome'.

(T)he singing mites, the truncated man who is a one-man band, the rooster that writes his name by spitting blood, Fogar's jelly-fish, the gluttonous parasols . . . these monstrosities without family or species are necessary associations; they obey mathematically the laws governing homonyms and the most exacting principles of order; they are inevitable . . . At the start no instrument or stratagem can predict their outcome. Then the marvelous mechanism takes over and transforms them, doubles their improbability by the game of homonyms, traces a 'natural' link between them, and delivers them at last with meticulous care. The reader thinks he recognizes the wayward wanderings of the imagination where in fact there is only random language, methodologically treated. (DL, 38.)

Foucault was clearly fascinated by Roussel's experiments with language because they were mechanical processes blindly following certain rules and principles, and yet they were capable of creating new and beautiful meanings. The machine-like production of surreal beauty illustrated for him the idea that language produces meanings independently of the initiatives of the subject. As opposed to Sartre, who argued that the beauties that appear in books are never accidental, as the beauty in nature is, because they are the outcome of the writing subject's intention, it is exactly the accidental creation of beauty that Foucault found riveting in the works of Raymond Roussel. His incredible characters and events were accidental combinations. Rather than being fantastic creations of delirious and ingenious imagination, they were the hazardous results of the mechanical treatment of language.

While Roussel himself was affirming the pure imagination of the writer above representing reality, Foucault discarded both sides

of this opposition because of the philosophical view of language that underlies it. In his view, Roussel's work was neither a representation of reality, nor the outward expression of the wanderings of his imagination. Instead it demonstrated, in the realm of literature, what in philosophy was called the linguistic turn. It exemplified the philosophical idea that language not only describes and 'translates' the subject's experiences of reality or his inner experiences such as fantasies and memories, but that it also forms reality. This means that the aim of literature is not only to translate our experiences into words as faithfully as possible, but in Foucault's view and more importantly, to create new experiences.

While Foucault's studies of scientific discourses analysed the way in which language formed an ontological order of things that was implicit in scientific theories and practices, he also argued that the language of literature was capable of forming alternative, unscientific and irrational ontological realms: different experiences of order on the basis of which different perceptual and practical grids became possible, and new ways of seeing and experiencing emerged. He wrote in *The Order of Things* that literature formed 'a sort of counter-discourse', freed from the principles of order that regulated scientific as well as everyday discourse. Its aim was precisely to transgress the limits of discourse, to make them visible and contestable, and to discover a 'madness' in language as 'that formless, mute, unsignifying region where language can find its freedom' (OT, 383).

In his other literary essays on writers such as Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot, Foucault also focused on the ability of experimental writing to transgress the limits of our ordinary concepts and experiences to the point of paradox: writing effaces the unifying subject and lets language overflow its ordinary confines. While language alone makes possible the ordered and rational knowledge of the world, it is also our access to the unreal and the irrational. The constitutive but at the same time ambiguous and anonymous nature of language renders it the eternally with-

drawing horizon, the infinitely rich background against which the subject can think and experience the world in new and creative ways.

In his studies of literature Foucault raised philosophical questions about the nature of language and about the writing subject as the origin of meaning. By seeking to challenge the phenomenological privilege accorded to the subject and the view of language it implied, he also mapped out new ideas of freedom that were not tied to the notion of a meaning-bestowing subject, its nature, initiatives or abilities. Unlike Sartre, he did not conceive of freedom as an inherent characteristic of the subject: it was not something that he or she had and could transfer to his or her works. Instead freedom characterized language itself and the experiences that it made possible. Language formed a boundless horizon that made a variety of experiences possible.

Although Foucault is generally interpreted as emphasizing the necessary structures of our thought and experience and denying our inherent freedom, there is an anti-humanist understanding of freedom as an unlimited proliferation of meanings and experiences implicitly safeguarded in his thought. He attempted to show how our thought is always constrained by deep, discursive structures beyond our control, but also how we can stretch its limits through avant-garde writing. Literature for him contested determinations and opened up new ways of experiencing the world.

## 5

## FROM ARCHAEOLOGY TO GENEALOGY

How can we define the relationship between genealogy ... and history in the traditional sense? We could, of course, examine Nietzsche's celebrated apostrophes against history, but we will put these aside for a moment and consider those instances when he conceives of genealogy as *wirkliche Historie* ... Historical meaning becomes a dimension of *wirkliche Historie* to the extent that it places within a process of development everything considered immortal in man. We believe that feelings are immutable, but every sentiment, particularly the noblest and most disinterested, has a history. We believe the dull constancy of instinctual life and imagine that it continues to exert its force indiscriminately in the present as it did in the past. But a knowledge of history easily disintegrates this unity, depicts its wavering course, locates its moments of strength and weakness, and defines its oscillating reign. It easily seizes the slow elaboration of instincts and those movements where, in turning upon themselves, they relentlessly set about their self-destruction. We believe, in any event, that the body obeys the exclusive laws of physiology and that it escapes the influence of history, but this too is false. The body is moulded by a great many distinct regimes; it is broken down by the rhythms of work, rest, and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistances. 'Effective' history differs from traditional history in

being without constants. Nothing in man – not even his body – is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men. The traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled. Necessarily, we must dismiss those tendencies that encourage the consoling play of recognitions. Knowledge, even under the banner of history, does not depend on 'rediscovery', and it emphatically excludes the 'rediscovery of ourselves'. History becomes effective to the extent that it introduces discontinuity into our very being – as it divides our emotions, dramatizes our instincts, multiplies our body and sets it against itself. 'Effective' history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature, and it will not permit itself to be transported by a voiceless obstinacy toward a millennial ending. It will uproot its traditional foundations and relentlessly disrupt its pretended continuity. This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting.<sup>18</sup>

'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History'

Foucault's essay 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' is often read as marking the beginning of the genealogical phase in his thought. The text introduces the concept of genealogy, a term borrowed from Friedrich Nietzsche, that subsequently became Foucault's favoured term for his own project. The essay is not a methodological pronouncement of his genealogy, however, but rather a meticulous reading of Nietzsche's texts, particularly his essay 'On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life'. The use of the concept of genealogy is already complex and inconsistent in Nietzsche's thought. It refers loosely to the critical historicization of something that was assumed not to have a history, such as the body and its natural instincts and functions or supposedly timeless moral values. The same holds true for Foucault. He never gave a specific or systematic definition of genealogy, and the key features of his genealogy have to be

collected from different books, articles and interviews. It is therefore better understood as a multilayered, critical practice rather than as a strict method.

Nietzsche's most famous use of genealogy occurs in his book *The Genealogy of Morals*, in which he presents a radical critique of morality by tracing its history. His argument amounted to a rejection of the supposedly eternal moral values of Christianity by showing their historical emergence from the psychological attributes of slaves. Christian morality was originally the morality of slaves who turned the attributes that they were forced to adopt into moral values: humility, modesty, self-denial and meekness. The morality that Nietzsche advocates is the morality of the masters. Their values – pride, glory and power – look like sinful conceit to the resentful slaves, but are life-affirming and positive for Nietzsche.

Although Foucault's and Nietzsche's methods share important key elements – such as the use of history as critique – Foucault's genealogy is not a faithful adaptation of Nietzsche's thought and it should not be read as such. Foucault did not operate with psychological or racial explanations the way Nietzsche did, for example, but profoundly questioned the importance of the individual subject and his or her psychological attributes. He also made it clear that he was more interested in using Nietzsche for his own purposes than in following him faithfully.<sup>19</sup>

He selected from Nietzsche's genealogy some key elements that became decisive for his own thought. He begins the essay 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' by writing that genealogy 'is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary' (NGH, 76). This characterization already indicates the opposition he wanted to set up: on the one side are the lofty philosophical systems advocating a reassuring belief in 'eternal truth, the immortality of the soul, and the nature of consciousness as always identical to itself', and on the other is genealogy which is self-effacing and unpretentious, but effective, precise and cutting. It involves the study of history and documents detailed facts, but this does not mean

that it is without philosophical or critical impact. In fact, exactly the opposite is true: its historiographical method represents a new way of doing philosophy that radically challenges idle metaphysical speculation. The aim is to historicize in order to radically question the timeless and inevitable character of practices and forms of thinking.

The shift from archaeology to genealogy that took place in Foucault's thought in the 1970s did not mean that he gave up the use of historiography as his philosophical method. Neither did he give up any of the major methodological insights that characterized archaeology. This would have meant falling back on traditional 'naïve' history. The shift to genealogy that takes place at the beginning of the 1970s is a shift in the focus of Foucault's questioning. What interested him in the history of science was no longer questions concerning the internal rules and conditions of the emergence of discursive practices, or whether the development of science was continuous or discontinuous. He turned instead to study the connection between power relations and the formation of scientific knowledge. The main claim in Foucault's genealogy is that the rules regulating scientific practices are always tied to the power relations of the society in question. Domains of knowledge and relations of power are intrinsically tied together, and this fundamental intertwinement is what Foucault refers to by the hybrid *power/knowledge*.

In his book *Discipline and Punish* Foucault illustrates the intertwinement of forms of knowledge with practices of power by discussing the emergence of criminology as a science in the nineteenth century. He argues that it developed in tandem with a specific practice of power, namely the prison. The goal of the modern prison was not just to punish, but ultimately to re-educate and reform the criminal. For this purpose it was important to gather knowledge about him: to record his behaviour, state of mind and gradual improvement, for example. Foucault shows how the practice of writing a detailed report on

every prisoner was introduced and made compulsory in prisons in the middle of the nineteenth century and argues that this knowledge formed the empirical data of criminology and made its birth as a science possible.<sup>20</sup>

The interests and needs of criminal justice encouraged the development of sciences such as criminology that could be used to facilitate the functioning of prisons. Foucault argues that mechanisms of power are always deployed according to procedures, instruments and objectives which are validated in more or less coherent systems of knowledge. For the effective functioning of the prison, it was important to have a body of knowledge that regulated and justified the exercise of punitive power. At the same time scientific knowledge necessarily possesses effects of power simply by virtue of being scientifically validated, rational and generally accepted. Even when criminology was not used directly to support the aims of punitive power, it shaped the ways that people thought and felt about crime, criminals and prisons.

This way of understanding the relationship between scientific knowledge and its social and political context is often called external in the philosophy of science. It means that our social and political interests and needs influence what kind of scientific research is funded and encouraged, and conversely, scientific truths shape our social and political interests and needs, but the content of the science itself is not thereby compromised. In other words, even if those in power can determine what kinds of questions are asked, the answers that science gives to the questions are nevertheless objectively true. In the case of criminology, the fact that the practices of punishing required the knowledge it provided did not yet imply that this knowledge itself was in any way biased.

Foucault's claim about the intertwinement of power and knowledge is, at times, stronger. He understands their relationship as internal: the social and political context of scientific knowledge also shapes the content of scientific knowledge itself.

In other words, the answers that criminology provided for those in power were themselves shaped by power structures. Criminology constructed classes of delinquents, for example, each endowed with its own characteristics and requiring a specific treatment. These supposedly objective and scientific classes reflected the social prejudices and hierarchies of the society at the time: criminals were deviants and perverts with dangerous predispositions and instincts. Foucault calls this knowledge 'a zoology of social sub-species' and cites the works of the early criminologists as appalling instances. It was argued, for example, that convicts who can be shown to have average intelligence, but who have been perverted by an 'iniquitous morality', require different treatment than those who belong to classes characterized by inherent inabilities. They must be isolated day and night, and 'when one is forced to bring them into contact with others, they should wear a light mask made of metal netting' (DP, 253).

It can of course be argued that extreme examples like this do not yet prove that *all* science is equally distorted. It is debatable to what extent Foucault is committed to the view that all scientific truths are social constructions and therefore necessarily laden with social and political values and interests. He clearly holds that science is a social practice. All societies have practices and institutions for the production of knowledge, and the development of science is a necessarily social rather than individual activity. Elements of knowledge have to conform to a set of rules and constraints characteristic of a given type of scientific discourse in a given period. This view does not, however, imply that all theories are equally true or false: it does not rule out the possibility of reaching objective truths. Rather than understanding objectivity as independence from all socially formed criteria, we can understand it as an achieved consensus of the scientific community. As long as the scientific community is open to criticism, the social background beliefs – or prejudices – that shape scientific theories can be questioned and the consensus on what is

objectively true can be transformed. The theories of the early criminologists, for example, have been replaced by theories that have corrected their biases.

Foucault explicitly restricted his analysis of the connections between power and knowledge to human sciences, to sciences in which 'the subject itself is posited as an object of possible knowledge'.<sup>21</sup> Even if our socially shaped background beliefs inevitably shape all scientific practices to some extent, it is clear that in the field of human sciences their influence is particularly strong and dangerous. Our tacit presuppositions about gender, race and class, for example, are less dangerous when we attempt to interpret the behaviour of subatomic particles rather than humans.

Foucault cautions us against adopting one background belief in particular, namely the assumption that there are anthropological universals: truths about human beings that hold in all cultures and all historical times. As soon as we ascertain that something must hold true for all human beings, we have created a norm against which human behaviour can be measured and judged. By establishing a scientific view of human sexuality that sees it as a natural and universal drive to procreate, for example, we have effectively marginalized a whole range of sexual behaviour. Foucault therefore insists that genealogy must be without constants and that it implies a systematic scepticism with respect to all anthropological universals.

In the realm of our knowledge, everything presented to us as having universal validity, insofar as human nature or the categories that can be applied to the subject are concerned, has to be tested and analyzed: to refuse the universals of 'madness', 'delinquency', or 'sexuality' does not mean that these notions refer to nothing at all, nor that they are only chimeras invented in the interest of a dubious cause. Yet the refusal entails more than the simple observation that their content varies with time and circumstances; it entails wondering about the conditions that make it possible, according to the rules of truth-telling, to recognize a

subject as mentally ill or to cause subjects to recognize the most essential part of themselves in the modality of their sexual desire. The first methodological rule for this sort of work is thus the following: to circumvent anthropological universals to the greatest extent possible, so as to interrogate them in their historical constitution. (FM, 317)

The constants or anthropological universals are thus not rejected at the outset, but are subjected to radical, historical questioning. Everything, including those things that we are convinced do not have a history, is scrutinized. An important one of them is the body. We believe that 'the body obeys the exclusive laws of physiology and that it escapes the influence of history', but Foucault argues that this is not true. Our bodies, too, exist only in society. They are moulded by norms of health, gender and beauty, for example. They are concretely shaped by diet, exercise and medical interventions. In short, they too have a history. Genealogies are 'histories of the body': they typically question all purely biological explanations of such complex areas of human behaviour as sexuality, insanity or criminality.

While Foucault's views of power and knowledge have a lot in common with influential strands in the philosophy of science arguing that science is social knowledge, his genealogies have stylistic features that set them apart from all conventional philosophical accounts. Genealogies can be read as exemplifying a specific textual genre.<sup>22</sup> Foucault shares with Nietzsche a highly rhetorical and hyperbolic style of writing that uses dramatic gestures and shocking images. *Discipline and Punish* famously begins with a detailed description of the public torture and execution of Robert Damiens, found guilty of regicide in 1757. Foucault gives us all the horrific details, taken from eyewitness accounts, of how Damiens was tortured with red-hot pincers, sulphur, molten lead, boiling oil and burning resin, and how his body was then drawn and quartered by four horses.

The dramatic features of genealogy are sometimes criticized as

unnecessary and manipulative. This form of representation is an essential part of the enactment of the genealogical critique, however, because the critical edge of genealogy lies in its ability to provoke an experience in the reader. It has to shock us into seeing something we have refused to see so far. The description of the torture of Damiens exemplifies one way of punishing criminals that seems horrendous and dramatic to us, but which was taken for granted not so very long ago. It forms a backdrop for Foucault's claims about the typically modern modes of punishment on which the book focuses.

Another stylistic feature that Foucault shares with Nietzsche is the attitude of distrust and irony. Genealogies are characterized by an attitude of scepticism with respect to what is held most revered and noble.<sup>23</sup> In Nietzsche's case this meant unmasking the detestable origins of morality, and in Foucault's case it took the form of questioning all purely scientific and humanitarian motives for reform as well as the notion of progress. In *History of Madness*, for example, Foucault argued that the reforms covering mental institutions were motivated less by humanitarian concerns than by the desire to bring about a more effective system of control. The irony is apparent in his attempts to turn around openly proclaimed aims and purposes to reveal their opposites. In his history of the prison, *Discipline and Punish*, he argued that despite its declared purpose, the function of the prison was, in effect, to produce delinquents rather than to prevent crime. He notes that 'for the observation that prison fails to eliminate crime, one should perhaps substitute the hypothesis that prison has succeeded extremely well in producing delinquency, a specific type, a politically or economically less dangerous – and, on occasion, usable – form of illegality' (DP, 277).

Despite the openly proclaimed Nietzschean influences, the essential elements of Foucault's thought did not change with the introduction of genealogy. What distinguishes genealogy, like archaeology, from traditional historiography is that it is *wirkliche Historie*, effective history: the point is not just to understand the

past, but also to change the way in which we see the present. The aim is to 'liberate' not only marginal groups such as the mentally ill and the imprisoned, but also the rest of us, by showing the contingencies at play in the formation of what we hold as inevitable, scientific truths.

## 6

## THE PRISON

Bentham's Panopticon is the architectural figure of this composition. We know the principles on which it is based: at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the window of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. In short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions – to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide – it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of the supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap. To begin with this made it possible – as a negative effect –

to avoid those compact, swarming, howling masses that were to be found in places of confinement, those painted by Goya or described by Howard. Each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor; but the side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companions. He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication. The arrangement of his room, opposite the central tower, imposes on him an axial visibility; but the divisions of the ring, those separated cells, imply a lateral invisibility. And this invisibility is a guarantee of order . . . The crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities. From the point of view of the guardian, it is replaced by a multiplicity that can be numbered and supervised; from the point of view of the inmates, by a sequestered and observed solitude.

Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers.

(DP, 2001)

Jeremy Bentham's design for an ideal prison, the Panopticon, dating from 1791, was Foucault's paradigm for a new type of power that he called *disciplinary power*. Bentham was a legal scholar and a political philosopher of the Enlightenment, and his prison design was largely regarded as a historical curiosity until Foucault focused his genealogical study on it. For him it was a

striking illustration, 'a diagram', for a new way of conceiving of power. Rather than being based on a sovereign person, such as the monarch, this new type of power was anonymous and mechanical. Rather than functioning through external constraints and spectacular violence, it operated through the internalization of a discreet, watchful gaze. Rather than hiding and gathering its subjects together, it attempted to make them visible and to separate them from each other.

Foucault's provocative claim in this first major book of his genealogical period is that although the Panopticon as such was not built, its essential elements came to characterize a new form of power: disciplinary power. These elements are present in the design and construction of numerous institutions and spaces of modern society, such as schools, hospitals, factories and prisons. We live in a disciplinary society in which power is exercised through pervasive but anonymous surveillance. Today disciplinary power takes the more technologically sophisticated form of automated cameras, electronic barcodes and monitored calls, but the operative principles remain the same.

Foucault's detailed discussion of the architectural design of an ideal prison is also an example of his preference for spatial models: for Foucault, to think philosophically is to think spatially. In one interview he commented on his 'spatial obsessions' by noting that it was through them that he found a way of thinking about the possible relations between power and knowledge.<sup>24</sup> The Panopticon shows in very concrete terms how a certain spatial distribution of power makes possible a more detailed and accurate knowledge of its subjects. When individuals' conduct can be constantly observed, it can also be assessed in detail. It is possible to measure levels, compare behaviours and rank performances. This knowledge strengthens the effects of power by offering new applications for devising ever more detailed and subtle ways of shaping inmates' behaviour, desires, aims and experiences. It makes it possible to punish and reward even minor deviations from the

norm, for example. It turns each individual into a 'case' that can be described, measured and compared with others, but also corrected, excluded and normalized. As Foucault writes in the extract, visibility is a trap because it assures the permanent hold of power over its subjects. Being constantly seen maintains the power relation. The Panopticon reveals the anatomy of modern power by demonstrating the essential interdependence between forms of knowledge, techniques of power and their subjects.

In his archaeological analyses Foucault had begun rethinking the subject by questioning its foundational status in the production of scientific knowledge. His adoption of genealogy as his method in the 1970s enabled him to present a more comprehensive account of the constitution of the subject – *subjectivation*. His major claim was that being a subject, a socially recognized individual with intelligible intentions, desires and actions, was only possible within the power/knowledge networks of a society. In his view, all identities were created through practices of power and knowledge. Power relations do not exist between subjects with predetermined identities, but are constitutive of the subjects themselves. They shape conduct and instil forms of self-awareness. The subjects over whom the power network is defined cannot be thought to exist apart from it.

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault analyses the ways in which criminal subjects – individuals who are understood and understand themselves as delinquents – are constituted in power/knowledge networks. Firstly, the practices in the prison concretely manipulate and shape their bodies through exercise regimes, minutely detailed rules, constant surveillance, diet and strict time schedules. Habits and patterns of behaviour are broken down and reconstructed in new ways. Secondly, prisoners' bodies are classified and examined scientifically. While the typologies of early criminology may have been discarded, the principles of observation and assessment have prevailed. Prisoners

are *cases* to be studied scientifically as well as to be corrected institutionally.

The processes of concrete bodily manipulation and scientific objectification strengthen each other. Subjection made theoretical objectification possible, resulting in the birth of sciences such as criminology and criminal psychiatry. The development of these corresponding sciences, on the other hand, helped in the development and rationalization of disciplinary technologies. Furthermore, the two dimensions were effectively linked together through normalization. Scientific discourses produce truths that function as the norm: they tell us what is the normal weight, blood pressure and number of sexual partners for a certain sex and age group, for example. Subjectivation operates through the internalization of these norms. We modify our behaviour in an endless attempt to approximate the normal, and in this process become certain kinds of subjects. Norms also further the objectification by reducing individuality to a common measure: we can all be reduced to a dot on a curve.

Where prisoners are concerned, the aim of disciplinary power is not to repress their interests or desires, but rather to construct them as normal. It does not subject the bodies to external violence in the same way as pre-modern power mutilated the body of Damians. The coercive power is internalized and the prisoner becomes his own guard. Although the body has in the past also been intimately tied to power and social order, Foucault claims that disciplinary power in this respect is essentially a new, modern phenomenon. Unlike older forms of bodily coercion, it does not mutilate the criminal body, but shapes it in more profound and detailed ways. The criminal literally incorporates the objectives of power, which become the norm for his or her own aims and behaviour. Foucault formulated this poetically by writing that the 'soul' of the prisoner – that which is supposed to be the most authentic part of him – is in fact an effect of the subjection of his body.

The man described for us, whom we are invited to free, is already in himself the effect of a subjection much more profound than himself. 'A soul' inhabits him and brings him to existence, which is itself a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body. (DP, 30.)

*Discipline and Punish* is not only a profound analysis and a philosophical rethinking of the relationships between power, knowledge and the subject; it is also a genealogical critique of our practices of punishing. It, too, arose out of Foucault's personal experience. He and some of his friends and colleagues formed the GIP, Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons (Prison Information Group), in 1971, the aim of which was to collect information about the intolerable conditions inside French prisons, particularly from people with first-hand experience, and to publicize it. This aim reflected Foucault's idea of the role of intellectuals in political struggles: it was not a question of suggesting reforms by telling people what to do, but rather one of using their visible and respectable status to make unacceptable aspects of reality known. Police violence, capital punishment and the inhuman conditions in French prisons took a central place in the public and political agenda in France in the 1970s, sparking riots and hunger strikes both inside and outside prisons. In this context *Discipline and Punish* was initially read in terms of its contemporary political implications. Its publication was surrounded by considerable publicity and it was described as having sent 'shock waves' through the prison education and social-work services.<sup>25</sup>

*Discipline and Punish* powerfully exemplifies the essential features of genealogical critique. It appears as a detailed, historical study documenting the development of modern carceral institutions from the dungeons and public spectacles of torture preceding them. It questions the inevitability of this development by showing its historical contingency as well as the internal con-

traditions in the functioning of modern prisons. It appears to refrain from moralistic talk, and instead puts forward an analysis of the implicit and sometimes explicit rationality of modern punitive practices in purely descriptive language. Yet its style and its examples clearly carry political implications and moral values. Foucault referred in passing to an execution, for example, that took place in France in 1972. He noted that this execution, unlike Damiens's, took place in secrecy: the guillotine was placed inside the prison walls and any witness who described the scene would be prosecuted. Capital punishment in 1970s France formed 'a strange secret between the law and those it condemns' (DP, 15).

Foucault noted that he did not intend *Discipline and Punish* as a work of criticism, if by criticism was simply meant the denunciation of the negative aspects of the current penal system.

I wanted to uncover the system of thought, the form of rationality that, since the end of the eighteenth century, has supported the notion that prison is really the best means, or one of the most effective and rational means, of punishing offences in a society. It seems to me when it was a question of reforming the penal system the reformers very often accepted, implicitly and sometimes even explicitly, the system of rationality that had been defined and put in place long before, and that they were simply trying to discover what the institutions and practices might be that would enable them to realize that system's scheme and achieve its ends. In bringing out the system of rationality underlying punitive practices, I wanted to indicate what the postulates of thought were that needed to be re-examined if one intended to transform the penal system . . . What elements of that system of rationality can still be accepted? What is the part that, on the other hand, deserves to be cast aside, abandoned, transformed and so on?<sup>26</sup>

The important lesson of Foucault's genealogical critiques is

summed up in his claim that to make something open to criticism means first making it intelligible. Only by understanding the underlying rationality of our practices can we hope to make substantial and lasting changes in them, and not merely replace them with other practices relying on the same principles. The analysis of disciplinary power can further our understanding of how the coercive practices of modern penal institutions operate with markedly different means and through a different rationality than those that are aimed solely at retribution through pain. It effectively reveals the double role of the present system: it aims at both punishing and correcting, and therefore it mixes juridical and anthropological practices.

Foucault argued that the intervention of psychiatry in the field of law that occurred at the beginning of the nineteenth century, for example, was part of the gradual shift in penal practice from a focus on the crime to a focus on the criminal. The new idea of the 'dangerous individual' referred to the danger potentially inherent in him or her, which implied that the aim of the penal system was not solely to punish, but more importantly to correct. The change in its aims, in its rationality or immanent logic, resulted in the birth of new types of carceral institutions and practices. The new rationality could not function in an effective way in the existing system without the emergence of a new form of technical knowledge – criminal psychiatry – that enabled the characterization of the criminal individual in him or herself, beneath the acts. It also resulted in the emergence of new, insidious forms of domination and violence, however.

Foucault thus did not analyse practices of punishing for the purpose of denouncing them. Neither did he propose any concrete alternative to them. He was attempting to provoke a response in the readers by questioning the rationality of these practices. The lasting, critical impact of *Discipline and Punish* lies in its ability to reveal to an unprecedented extent the processes of

subjectivation that operate in modern penal institutions. The modern prison does not just punish by depriving its inmates of liberty, it produces delinquent subjects, types of people with a dangerous, criminal nature.

## REPRESSED SEXUALITY

Continuing this line of discussion, we can advance a certain number of propositions:

- Power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations.
- Relations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships (economic processes, knowledge relationships, sexual relations), but are immanent in the latter; they are the immediate effects of the divisions, inequalities, and disequilibria which occur in the latter, and conversely they are the internal conditions of these differentiations; relations of power are not in superstructural positions, with merely a role of prohibition or accompaniment; they have a directly productive role, wherever they come into play.
- Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix – no such duality extending from the top down and reacting on more and more limited groups to the very depth of the social body. One must suppose rather that the manifold relationships of force that take shape and come into play in the machinery of

production, in families, limited groups, and institutions, are the basis for wide-ranging effects of cleavage that run through the social body as a whole . . .

- Power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective. If in fact they are intelligible, this is not because they are the effect of another instance that 'explains' them, but rather because they are imbued, through and through, with calculation: there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives . . .
- Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority to power. Should it be said that one is always 'inside' power, there is no 'escaping' it, there is no absolute outside where it is concerned, because one is subject to law in any case? Or that, history being the ruse of reason, power is the ruse of history, always emerging the winner? This would be to misunderstand the strictly relational character of power relationships. Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromise, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the strategic field of power relations . . .<sup>27</sup>

*The History of Sexuality*

One of the most influential contemporary theories of power is presented in the form of short propositions over three pages of *The History of Sexuality*, volume 1. Although Foucault elucidated and developed his understanding of power in a number of essays,

lectures and interviews throughout the rest of his life, he put forward his crucial ideas in these pages. Despite the fact that *The History of Sexuality* may at first seem relatively easy to read, it is deceptively dense and difficult. As the propositions about power demonstrate, large theoretical moves are conducted in small spaces with fast strokes.

Foucault's rethinking of power was specifically targeted against liberal and Marxist conceptions of power, the two dominant conceptual models in the 1970s. The problem was the 'economism' in these theories: both of these traditions viewed power through economic models. It was conceived in the 'liberal' or 'juridical' model as a commodity, regarded as something that could be possessed and traded in the way that one trades a commodity. Against this view, Foucault argued that power exists only when it is exercised. It is not like a commodity, but is rather an action in a relationship. He also criticized the excessive focus in the liberal tradition on contracts, rights, the law and legitimization. It is not possible to account for the subtle operations and mechanisms of modern power within this conceptual framework. Disciplinary power does not function according to the dichotomous distinction between legal and illegal, but uses much more subtle distinctions by operating on the axis of healthy/sick and normal/abnormal, for example.

The Marxist model reduces power relations to economic relations: an antagonistic relationship between two pre-existing classes defined in economic terms. Foucault argued instead that power relations form a dense network that traverses the whole of society, rather than a dual structure of rulers and the ruled. Going along with the formula of a generalized bourgeoisie and its interests, for example, meant reducing the multiplicity and variety of power relations to a simplistic opposition between two classes. One should not start by looking for the centre of power, or for the individuals, institutions or classes that rule, but should rather construct a 'microphysics of power' that focuses on the extremities: families, workplaces, everyday practices and marginal

institutions. One has to analyse power relations from the bottom up and not from the top down, and to study the myriad ways in which the subjects are constituted in different but intersecting networks.

Despite being dispersed among various interlacing networks throughout society, power nevertheless has rationality, a series of aims and objectives, and the means of attaining them. This does not mean that any individual subject has consciously formulated them. As the example of the Panopticon shows, power often functions according to a clear rationality irrespective of the intentions and motives of the individual who guards the prison from the tower. Any individual, taken almost at random, can operate the system: the spatial organization of the cells ensures permanent visibility and instils awareness of it in the inmates. Similarly, no one person directs the complex network of power relations that function in a society. Both those who seemingly hold power, the prison guards, for example, and those who are under guard are caught up in the rationality of the power network. Their behaviour is regulated and largely determined by rules of practices that they did not formulate and of which they are not even necessarily aware.

Power does not form a deterministic system of overbearing constraints, however. Because it is understood as an unstable network of practices, where there is power, there is always resistance. The resistance is part of these practices and of their dynamics and is thus never in a position of exteriority. Just as there is no centre of power, there is no centre of resistance somewhere outside it. Resistance is rather inherent in the power relations, it is 'the odd term in the relations of power' (HS, 96). While power relations permeate the whole body of society, they may be denser in some regions and less dense in others.

Neither are all power relations qualitatively the same. In a later interview Foucault distinguished between what he called strategic relationships between individuals and states of domination.<sup>28</sup> Strategic relationships refer to the ways in which individuals try

to determine the conduct of others, and they are not necessarily harmful in any way. Foucault gives as an example the relationship between a teacher and a student. This is clearly a power relationship in which the teacher tries to determine the conduct of the student. As long as their relationship is based on mutual consent and can be reversed – the students are able to evaluate the performance of the teacher, for example – there seem to be no grounds for resistance.

States of domination, on the other hand, refer to situations in which individuals are unable to overturn or alter power relations. Even though power relations are essentially fluid and reversible, what usually characterizes them is that they have become stabilized through institutions. This means that their mobility is limited, and that there are strongholds that are difficult to suppress because they have been institutionalized. In other words, the strategic relations between people have become rigid. In these situations one should try to develop forms of resistance that will transform relations of domination into strategic relations.

While it is thus impossible to step out of the social field structured by power relations, it is possible to effect changes in them: to free subjects from states of domination and expose them to a situation in which power relations are interchangeable, variable and allow for strategies for altering them. Foucault goes as far as to set this as an explicit task.

I don't believe there can be a society without relations of power, if you understand them as means by which individuals try to conduct, to determine the behaviour of others. The problem is not of trying to dissolve them in the Utopia of a perfectly transparent communication, but to give one's self the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics, the ethos, the practice of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with the minimum of domination. (EPF, 18.)

Although there can be no overall liberation from power, there

can and will be 'particular' emancipations from different states of domination: from oppressive relations of power and the effects of certain normalizing techniques.

Foucault's propositions about power were only intended as a conceptual tool for rethinking the main topic of the book – namely sexuality. The main aim of *The History of Sexuality*, volume 1, was to reconfigure the relationship between sexuality and power: rather than power repressing the manifestations of natural sexuality, it produced them. The book was going to be a short introduction to a large body of work consisting of seven volumes. The remaining six volumes never materialized, but the introduction, of less than two hundred pages, radically transformed our conception of sexuality.

The book begins with a repudiation of the 'repressive hypothesis', the idea that sexuality in the Victorian era was repressed and discourse on it silenced. Foucault claims that it was not repression that characterized the primary attitude of modern society towards sex, it was rather that sexuality became the object of a new kind of discourse – medical, juridical and psychological – and that discourse on it actually multiplied. Sexuality was inextricably linked to truth: these new discourses were able to tell us the scientific truth about ourselves through our sexuality.

Sexuality has thus become an essential construct in determining not only a person's moral worth, but also his or her health, desire and identity. Subjects are further obligated to tell the truth about themselves by confessing the details of their sexuality. Foucault argued that modern sexuality was characterized by the secularization of religious techniques of confession: one no longer confesses the details of one's sexual desire to a priest; instead one goes to a doctor, a therapist, a psychologist or a psychiatrist.

The society that emerged in the nineteenth century – bourgeois, capitalist, or industrial society, call it what you will – did not confront sex with a fundamental refusal of recognition. On the

contrary, it put into operation an entire machinery for producing true discourses concerning it. Not only did it speak of sex and compel everyone to do so; it also set out to formulate the uniform truth of sex. (HS, 69.)

Although the book is a historical study of the emergence of modern sexuality in the nineteenth century, Foucault's target once again was the contemporary conceptions. The prevalent views on sexuality in the 1960s and 1970s held that there was a natural and healthy sexuality that all human beings shared simply by virtue of being human, and this sexuality was currently repressed by cultural prohibitions and conventions such as bourgeois morality and capitalist socio-economic structures. Repressed sexuality was the cause of various neuroses and it was important to have an active and free sexuality. The popular discourse on sexuality thus fervently argued for sexual liberation: we had to liberate our true sexuality from the repressive mechanisms of power.

Foucault challenged this view by showing how our conceptions and experiences of sexuality are in fact always the result of specific cultural conventions and mechanisms of power and could not exist independently of them. Sexuality, like mental illness, only exists in a society. The mission to liberate our repressed sexuality was fundamentally misguided because there was no authentic or natural sexuality to liberate. To free oneself from one set of norms only meant adopting different norms in their stead, and that could turn out to be just as imperative and normalizing. He wrote mockingly that the irony of our endless preoccupation with sexuality was that we believed that it had something to do with our liberation (HS, 159).

In order to challenge the accepted relationship between sexuality and repressive power Foucault had to re-conceive the nature of power. His major claim was that power was not essentially repressive, but it was productive. It does not operate by repressing and prohibiting the true and authentic expressions of

a natural sexuality. Instead it produces, through cultural normative practices and scientific discourses, the ways in which we experience and conceive of our sexuality. Power relations are 'the internal conditions' of our sexual identities.

Foucault introduces the influential concept of *biopower* at the end of *The History of Sexuality*. It illustrates further the idea of productive rather than repressive power. Biopower is not repressive or destructive, but appears as essentially protective of life. It focuses on the health of individual bodies as well as the population: it effects the regulatory control of propagation, birth and mortality as well as the level of health and life expectancy, for example. While being explicitly concerned with health and well-being, biopower is an extremely effective form of social control that takes over the management of the life of individuals from the time before their birth until they die. An example of biopower would not be a repressive institution such as a prison or a labour camp, but a caring facility such as a maternity clinic. While the overt aim of maternity clinics is the wellbeing of mothers and babies, they also have aims and effects that are more problematic, such as the medicalization of pregnancy and the intensification of the social control of family life. Medical experts intervene in experiences and areas of life that were previously considered private. The power to make decisions about how to give birth, for example, has moved from pregnant women to medical experts.

Foucault's analysis of biopower as a particularly modern form of power has foreshadowed the criticism of medical intervention in today's society: larger and larger areas of life are medicalized and brought under bio-scientific control. He does not make explicit judgements about medicalization, but exposes the theoretical underpinnings and historical processes that have made its growth possible. The notion of biopower highlights the way in which bio-scientific knowledge functions as an important instrument of power, and supports the socio-political control of people in modern society.

## 8

## A TRUE SEX

Do we truly need a true sex? With a persistence that borders on stubbornness, modern Western societies have answered in the affirmative. They have obstinately brought into play this question of a 'true sex' in an order of things where one might have imagined that all that counted was the reality of the body and the intensity of its pleasures.

For a long time, however, such a demand was not made, as is proven by the history of the status which medicine and law have granted to hermaphrodites. Indeed it was a very long time before the postulate that a hermaphrodite must have a sex – a single, a true sex – was formulated. For centuries it was simply agreed that hermaphrodites had two . . .

Biological theories of sexuality, juridical conceptions of the individual, forms of administrative control in modern nations, led little by little to rejecting the idea of a mixture of the two sexes in the single body, and consequently to limiting the free choice of indeterminate individuals. Henceforth, everybody was to have one and only one sex. Everybody was to have his or her primary, profound, determined and determining sexual identity; as for the elements of the other sex that might appear, they could only be accidental, superficial, or even quite simply illusory. From the medical point of view, this meant that when confronted with a hermaphrodite, the doctor was no longer concerned with recog-

nizing the presence of the two sexes, juxtaposed or intermingled, or with knowing which of the two prevailed over the other, but rather with deciphering the true sex that was hidden beneath the ambiguous appearances. He had, as it were, to strip the body of its anatomical deceptions and discover the true sex behind organs that might have put on the forms of the opposite sex. For someone who knew how to observe and to conduct an examination, these mixtures of sex were no more than disguises of nature: hermaphrodites were always 'pseudo-hermaphrodites'. Such, at least, was the thesis that tended to gain credence in the eighteenth century, through a certain number of important and passionately argued cases . . .

I am well aware that medicine in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries corrected many things in this reductive oversimplification. Today, nobody would say that all hermaphrodites are 'pseudo', even if one considerably limits an area into which many kinds of anatomical anomalies were formerly admitted without discrimination. It is also agreed, though with much difficulty, that it is possible for an individual to adopt a sex that is not biologically his own.

Nevertheless, the idea that one must indeed finally have a true sex is far from being completely dispelled. Whatever the opinion of the biologists on this point, the idea that there exists complex, obscure and essential relationships between sex and truth is to be found – at least in a diffused state – not only in psychiatry, psychoanalysis, and psychology, but also in current opinion.<sup>29</sup>

*Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs  
of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*

Herculine Barbin was a hermaphrodite who lived at the end of the nineteenth century, at the time when scientific theories about sex and sexuality were gaining prominence. She was designated as female at birth, but reclassified as a man by doctors when she was an adult. She/he was incapable of adapting her/himself to the new identity, however, and committed suicide

at the age of thirty. She/he left behind memoirs recounting her/his tragic story, which Foucault discovered in the archives of the Department of Public Hygiene. He edited them and they were published with an introduction written by him.

Foucault's introduction is short, but significant. He poses questions about hermaphroditism in terms of whether we really need the idea of a *true sex*. Using the example of a hermaphrodite, he makes visible how deep in our thinking lies the idea that everybody has a definite and naturally given sex: that our true sex is the cause of our behaviour, as well as the cause of our observable sexual characteristics. The true sex determines the individual's gender identity, behaviour and desire for the opposite sex. The story of the hermaphrodite demonstrates that there is no true sex to be found in our bodies: the idea is rather a product of the development of scientific discourses and juridical procedures.

Foucault refers to the Middle Ages when it was common practice to think that a hermaphrodite was a person that combined both masculine and feminine characteristics. When the individual had legally reached adulthood, he/she could choose which sex to keep. This conception was superseded by scientific theories about sex that developed around the same time as the juridical concepts and practices related to the idea of a true sex. Everybody had only one true sex, which could be determined conclusively by experts. All the characteristics of the opposite sex in one's body and soul were deemed arbitrary, imaginary or superficial. The true sex further determined the individual's gender role, and his or her moral responsibility was to behave accordingly. The doctor, as the expert in recognizing this true sex, had to 'strip the body of its anatomical deceptions and discover the one true sex behind organs that might have put on the forms of the opposite sex'.

Foucault had taken up the question of whether we could find a scientific and objective truth about sex at the end of *The History of Sexuality*. He invented an imaginary opponent who claimed that Foucault's history of sexuality only managed to argue for

cultural construction of sexuality because he evaded 'the biologically established existence of sexual functions for the benefit of phenomena that are variable, perhaps, but secondary, and ultimately superficial' (HS 150–51). The imaginary critic raised the question about a natural and necessary foundation of sexuality in the body: even if the manifestations of sexuality are culturally constructed and variable, there must nevertheless be a biological foundation in the body, a pre-cultural, embodied givenness that cannot be bent at will.

Foucault responded to his opponent by firstly denying that his analysis of sexuality implied 'the elision of the body, anatomy, the biological, the functional' (HS, 151). On the contrary, what was needed was an analysis that would overcome the biology/culture distinction (HS, 152). Secondly, he refuted the claim that sex was a given, biological foundation, and as such independent of power. The notion of a natural and foundational sex was a normative, historical construct that functioned as an important anchorage point for biopower. The idea that 'sex' was the scientific foundation, the true, causal origin of one's gender identity, sexual identity and sexual desire made it possible to effectively normalize sexual and gendered behaviour. If one had scientific knowledge about one's true sex it was possible to evaluate, pathologize and correct one's sexual and gendered behaviour by viewing it as either 'normal' or 'abnormal'.

Foucault's aim was to study how the scientific idea of 'sex' emerged in the different strategies of power, and what role it played. In a much quoted passage he writes:

We must not make the mistake of thinking that sex is an autonomous agency which secondarily produces manifold effects of sexuality over the entire length of its surface of contact with power. On the contrary, sex is the most speculative, most ideal, and most internal element in a deployment of sexuality organized by power in its grip on bodies and their materiality, their forces, energies, sensations, and pleasures. (HS, 155.)

By claiming that sex was imaginary Foucault was not claiming that, in reality, there were no men and women. He was rather trying to problematize a certain kind of explanatory framework of sexuality and gender: the idea of sex as a foundation or an invisible cause, which supports these visible effects. He critically appraises the idea of a natural, scientifically defined true sex by revealing the historical development of this form of thought. He does not claim that sex, understood as the categories of maleness and femaleness, was invented in a particular historical period and that we could give it up when we wanted to. He rather analyses the ways in which these categories were scientifically founded and explained in discourses of truth, and how this 'pure' explanation in fact created these categories so that they were understood as 'natural'. Scientific representations of sex as a natural and necessary ground for sexual and gendered identities had a normative function in the power/knowledge strategy that constituted 'normal' men and women.

Foucault's aim in *The History of Sexuality* was thus to historicize not only sexuality, but also sex. This idea has profoundly influenced feminist theory. The American philosopher Judith Butler has effectively appropriated Foucault's thinking on the relationship between subject, power and sex for the question of gendered subjects. She has argued that there is no true sex behind gender identity that would be its objective cause and biological foundation. Instead, gender identity is constructed as a normative and regulatory ideal in the networks of power and knowledge. Individuals perform gender by repeating behaviour that approximates this ideal. While their behaviour is understood to be the inevitable and natural consequence of their sex, Butler argues that it is actually a performance without any natural and foundational cause. Feminine behaviour, for example, is not the result of a true and foundational female sex, but the reverse is true: the idea of a true and foundational female sex is the result of feminine behaviour. The idea of a stable gender core is a fiction that is upheld by a constantly ongoing performance.<sup>30</sup>

Not only did Foucault influence feminist thinkers, his views on sexuality and sex have also influenced many gay activists and intellectuals. An American theorist in sexuality studies, David Halperin, writes that the effect of his denaturalization of sexuality was the emergence of a critical perspective on the power of scientific experts over 'abnormal' subjects. The political implications of such a perspective were not lost on lesbians and gay men. They had had too much negative first-hand experience of expert discourses of sexuality – pathologizing, criminalizing and moralizing discourses of psychiatry, sexology, criminology and the social sciences – to trust them.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the fact that Foucault never took a position in empirical debates as to whether homosexuality was constituted socially or biologically, and he wrote and talked in interviews very rarely about his own homosexuality, his life and his work have had a profound effect on the academic discipline of gay and lesbian studies. His conception of sexuality has, to a large extent, founded a new theoretical approach to sexuality called queer theory. In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault briefly analysed the historical development that led to the emergence of the identity 'homosexual'. The new scientific classification and persecution of peripheral sexualities in the nineteenth century entailed a new specification of individuals. While sodomy had been a category of forbidden acts and its perpetrators had been understood as nothing more than individuals who broke the law, the homosexual became 'a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life, a life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology'. The homosexual person became completely defined by his sexuality, which was understood as the hidden cause and the fundamental principle that explained his whole personality and all of his actions. As Foucault writes, 'the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species' (HS, 42–3). His influential claim was that 'homosexual' was not a name that referred to a natural kind of being.

It was a discursive construction shaped by specific power relations that had come to be understood as a natural and scientifically objective category.

The main idea behind the queer conception of sexuality is that the identities of gay and lesbian – as well as of heterosexual – are not natural, essential identities, but are culturally constructed through normative discourses and power relations regulating the 'healthy' and 'normal' expressions of sexuality. This does not mean that homosexuality does not 'really' exist. Just because something is constructed does not mean that it is not real. People are defined and they must think and live according to such constructions. The aim of sexual politics, however, cannot be simply to find one's true identity and to embrace and express it – to 'come out' – because this identity is constructed through the oppressive power relations that it wants to challenge and to resist.

The goal of queer politics has to be more complicated than simple liberation from power and the affirmation of one's homosexuality: we must question and even deny the identities that are imposed on us as natural and essential by making visible their cultural construction and dependence on the power relations that are operative in society. Rather than thinking in terms of stable binary categories such as man and woman, heterosexual and homosexual, we should study their constitution and the ways in which sexuality emerges as a complex construction only in relation to them. The heterosexual/homosexual binary is the result of homophobic power relations, just as man/woman is a conceptualization of a sexist society. In both cases the first term of the binary refers to what is the norm, privileged and unproblematic, while the second refers to the aberration, to that which differs from the norm. Sexual and gendered identities are constructed not as politically neutral and natural differences, but as mutually exclusive and highly normative terms that reflect the power relations of society.

From this it follows that we also have to invent new strategies of resistance against sexist and homophobic practices and forms

of thinking. Foucault emphasized that what the gay movement needed was 'much more *the art of life* than a science or scientific knowledge (or pseudo-scientific knowledge) of what sexuality is'.

We have to understand that with our desires, through our desires, go new forms of relationships, new forms of love, new forms of creation. Sex is not a fatality: it's a possibility for a creative life.<sup>32</sup>

Queer politics has often taken the form of the creative appropriation, proliferation and theatrical re-signification of our identities and identity categories. Sexuality should be understood as a practice or a way of being that provides possibilities for experimentation and multiple pleasures, rather than as a psychological condition that we must reveal the truth about. It should be transferred from the realms of individual pathology and true identity to the realms of creative politics and personal experimentation.

## POLITICAL POWER, RATIONALITY AND CRITIQUE

I believe that from the fifteenth century on and before the Reformation, one can say that there was a veritable explosion of the art of governing men. There was an explosion in two ways: first, by displacement in relation to the religious centre, let's say if you will, secularization, the expansion in civil society of this theme of the art of governing men and the methods of doing it; and then, second, the proliferation of this art of governing into a variety of areas – how to govern children, how to govern the poor and the beggars, how to govern the family, a house, how to govern armies, different groups, cities, states and also how to govern one's body and mind. How to govern was, I believe, one of the fundamental questions about what was happening in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It is a fundamental question which was answered by the multiplication of all the arts of governing – the art of pedagogy, the art of politics, the art of economics, if you will – and of all the institutions of government, in the wider sense the term government had at the time.

So, this governmentalization, which seems to me to be rather characteristic of these societies in Western Europe in the sixteenth century, cannot be dissociated from the question 'how not to be governed?' I do not mean that governmentalization would be opposed in a kind of face-off by the opposite affirmation, 'we do not want to be governed, and we do not want to be governed at

all.' I mean that, in this great preoccupation about the way to govern and the search for the ways to govern, we identify a perpetual question which would be: 'how not to be governed like that, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them.' And if we accord this movement of governmentalization of both society and individuals the historic dimension and breadth which I believe it had, it seems that one could approximately locate therein what we could call the critical attitude. Facing them head on and as compensation, or rather, as both partner and adversary to the arts of governing, as an act of defiance, as a challenge, as a way of limiting these arts of governing and sizing them up, transforming them, of finding a way to escape from them or, in any case, a way to displace them, with a basic distrust, but also and by the same token, as a line of development of the art of governing, there would have been something born in Europe at that time, a kind of general cultural form, both a political and moral attitude, a way of thinking, etc. and which I would very simply call the art of not being governed or better, the art of not being governed like that and at that cost. I would therefore propose, as a very first definition of critique, this general characterization: the art of not being governed quite so much.<sup>33</sup>

'What Is Critique?'

From 1970 until his death in 1984, Foucault held the chair of the history of systems of thought at the Collège de France, the most prestigious academic institution in the country. Unlike other academic institutions, it requires no diploma of its members and grants no degrees to its students. The professors holding the chairs are expected to give an annual course of lectures in which they discuss their research in progress, and these courses are open to the public and require no registration. The thirteen annual lectures that Foucault delivered were veritable events in the French academic scene: the large audience filled two of the Collège de France's lecture theatres to the last seat. It was here

that he developed many of the ideas that were later elaborated in his books, but the lectures were not simply outlines or drafts of the books. They contained a lot of material that Foucault never published in written form, and they therefore have a relatively independent status in his oeuvre.

During 1978 and 1979, in the lecture series that followed the publication of *The History of Sexuality*, volume I, Foucault turned his attention to the study of government and governmentality.<sup>34</sup> In his 1978 series he analysed the historical development of the art of governing, from the classical Greek and Roman periods via Christian pastoral guidance to the notion of state reason and the science of the police, and in the 1979 lectures he discussed liberal and neo-liberal forms of governmentality. Despite the fact that the complete series has only recently been published, the ideas that Foucault developed in them have inspired many seminal studies, particularly in the political and social sciences.

While government historically referred to a wide range of practices, from governing children to religious guidance of the soul, in the context of the modern state it has taken the form of governing a population. It was this historical development, 'the genealogy of the modern state' or 'the history of governmentality' that he attempted to expose in his lectures. He wanted to articulate and to reveal, through a historical analysis, the development of the specific type of political rationality and power technology that was implemented in the exercise of modern state power.

Instead of ruling over a territory and its inhabitants, the object of modern forms of government is a *population*: an object of statistical analysis and scientific knowledge with its own intrinsic regularities. To govern it, forms of knowledge specific to it are needed. It is necessary to know its rates of death, birth and diseases, life expectancy, labour capacity and wealth, for example. Population and its welfare form both the field of intervention of governmental techniques as well as the ultimate end of governmental rationality. Governmentality refers to the development of

this essentially modern, complex form of power that focuses on the population: it is exercised through administrative institutions, forms of knowledge as well as explicit tactics and strategies. Instead of political power primarily taking the form of sovereign power – individual or communal sovereign ruling judicial subjects with the instrument of laws – we live in society in which a complex managerial and administrative apparatus governs a population with policies and strategies.

Foucault's analysis reveals that the modern governmental rationality has two major features. On the one hand, the development of the modern state is characterized by the centralization of political power: a centralized state with highly organized administration and bureaucracy has emerged. While this feature is commonly analysed and also criticized in political thought, Foucault also identifies the evolution of a second feature that appears to be antagonistic to this development. He claims that the modern state is characterized by individualizing power – or pastoral power as he also calls it. By this he means the development of power technologies oriented towards individuals in an attempt to govern their conduct in a continuous and permanent way. The aim is to constantly ensure, sustain and improve the lives of each and every person. It is power that relies on individualizing knowledge about every aspect of life, and it functions through the political control of individuals.

This individualizing power is intertwined with the aims of centralization. The state has to take care of living beings, understood as a population. It must focus on the life and the health of its people, and Foucault therefore calls the politics of the modern state *biopolitics*. The result is the increasing intervention of the state in the everyday life of individuals: their health, sexuality, body and diet.

Foucault's claim was that to understand the practice of government in the broad sense of controlling people's conduct, we have to study the technologies of power, and also the political rationality underpinning them. The practices and institutions of

government are enabled, regulated and justified by a specific form of reasoning or rationality that defines their ends and the suitable means of achieving them. To understand power as a set of relations, as Foucault repeatedly suggested, means understanding how such relations are rationalized. It means examining how forms of rationality inscribe themselves in practices and systems of practices, and what role they play within them.

The exposition and analysis of the historically changing governmental rationalities was a pivotal goal in Foucault's lectures. His claim was that it was possible and necessary within political philosophy to analyse different political rationalities just as it was possible to analyse different scientific rationalities in the philosophy of science, for example. The analysis of political power should thus not focus only on political theories, political choices or institutions, or on the kind of people who rule them, but should also incorporate the concrete practices that give form to specific political rationalities. The aim of Foucault's analysis was not to lay out and legitimate the best form of government, but to analyse historically the immanent rationality of different governmental practices.

The analysis of governmentality does not replace the earlier understanding of power, however. Foucault still held that the forms of the government of men by one another in a given society are multiple and cannot be reduced to political institutions or to a single overarching political rationality. What has to be analysed, but also questioned, is the historically specific rationalities that are intrinsic to practices. He was still using a similar type of analysis to the one he had used to study the techniques and practices of power in the context of individual subjects within particular, local institutions: the primacy of practices over institutions was still crucial.

Foucault had shifted the emphasis in his analysis of disciplinary power from repressive institutions to productive practices. He was now attempting to move from a theory focusing on the institution of the state to an analysis of modern practices of

government. He criticized the tendency to demonize the state in political thought, to see it as the simple enemy and the root of all political problems. The state does not only exercise repressive, negative power over the social body, it was one historical modality of 'government' that reflected changes in the rationality of governmental practices.

At the same time, Foucault's analysis of governmentality adds some new and important dimensions to his understanding of power that are often overlooked. Firstly, while his analyses of disciplinary power were restricted to specialized institutional contexts, the idea of power as government widens the scope of his understanding of power to the domain of the state. With the notion of government he was able to study larger, strategic problems, which his 'microphysics of power' – an examination of the forms of power focused on individual behaviour – was not able to deal with. By studying modern state power he was able to transport his understanding of power to the domain that is traditionally understood as the political. Although his earlier analyses of disciplinary power had provided some interesting avenues for political thought, a common criticism had been that the attention to specific practices and special techniques failed to address the larger issues of power involved in politics. His lectures on governmentality can be read as a response to these objections.

Secondly, it was through the idea of power as government that Foucault was able to elaborate his understanding of resistance. Because government refers to strategic, regulated and rationalized modes of power that have to be legitimized through forms of knowledge and specific truth claims, the idea of critique as a form of resistance now becomes crucial. To govern is not to physically determine the conduct of passive objects. Government involves offering reasons why the governed should do what they are told, and this means that they can also question these reasons.

In the lecture entitled 'What Is Critique?' held in May 1978 for the Société française de philosophie, Foucault links the question 'how to govern' to the other question that has always

complemented it in Western political thought and practice: how *not* to govern, or better, how not to govern *like that*. He makes it clear that he is not referring to fundamental anarchism, which would be absolutely and wholeheartedly resistant to any governmentalization, but is rather attempting to identify a specific attitude that was critical of it and that had developed in tandem with it. This critical attitude towards forms of government supported the practice of political critique.

The changing relationships between power and knowledge – the politics of truth – regulate the ways in which political regimes justify themselves and eclipse alternative political arrangements by casting their representation of the order of things as true. Resistance is therefore not a blind spot in practices of power, but is rather an important aspect of the practices of knowledge that form the level of justification for power relations. The practice of critique must question the reasons for governing *like that*: the legitimate principles, procedures and means of governing.

Foucault's own lectures on governmentality seem to abstain from political critique, however. He discussed historical texts on pastoral power and reason of state, which he believed marked the emergence of specifically modern forms of government, but he did not present any explicit political criticism. He also noted that since the modern state is both individualizing and totalizing – political power is centralized, but focuses on individuals – it is not enough to criticize just one of these effects. Opposing it with the individual and his interests is just as hazardous as opposing it with the community and its requirements. Instead we must expose and criticize the political rationality that underlies the power relations of the modern state that produce these effects. 'Liberation can come only from attacking not just one of these two effects, but political rationality's very roots.'<sup>35</sup> The political critique that Foucault advocates is thus not reducible to passing judgements. We must question our practices of governing as well as the terms and categories – the evaluative framework – through which political judgements are formulated.

Political critique and its constraints have remained a contentious topic that Foucault's critics have repeatedly taken up. They have argued that, despite Foucault's explicit intentions, his thought nevertheless makes political critique impossible because of its lack of philosophically articulated normative grounding. To criticize modern forms of power we must be able to give acceptable reasons why they are intolerable. These reasons form the normative grounding of the critique: we could argue, for example, that human beings should be free to make choices concerning their health, and forms of biopower that restrict this freedom are therefore insupportable. Foucault gives us no such reasons and invites the question of why we should read his descriptions of modern society as critiques at all.

The best known of these critics is Jürgen Habermas, an important German philosopher and the foremost living representative of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. He has argued that critique by definition means making evaluative claims, and these claims must be justified, if challenged, by making recourse to valid reasons. Foucault is not able to justify his claims with reasons and he could therefore only pose as a critic of modern society. In telling us why we should resist state power that is both individualizing and totalizing, for example, he has to advocate positive values or rights of some kind, such as human freedom and political autonomy.

The debate between 'Habermasians' and 'Foucaultians' has been going on since the late 1970s, and the literature it has produced is extensive. As many commentators have noted, it has repeatedly run into a dead end, and has been closed off by misunderstandings and ambiguities. One way of overcoming the impasse on the Foucaultian side has been simply to redefine what critique is and to deny that it means passing judgements. Foucault himself wrote: 'A critique does not consist in saying that things aren't good the way they are. It consists in seeing on what type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established, unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based.'<sup>36</sup>

He sought to diagnose our present, our political rationality, forms of normalized subjectivity and the kind of deployment of power that produced them. He thereby opened up a politicized space that does not prescribe explicit political programmes, but makes it possible to challenge accepted necessities.

As I have argued earlier, we can also read Foucault's genealogies as attempts not to convince us by persuasive, rational arguments that something in the present is intolerable, but to *show* it. The normative grounding is unarticulated, but that does not mean that it does not exist. Genealogy can open our eyes to the need for a political criticism of present practices and the possibility of their transformation, but criticism and change do not automatically follow from genealogy. Foucault readily accepted that political criticism and action were required to fill the gap, making the possibilities opened up by genealogy into actualities. Politics is not, however, the arena of a philosopher. Foucault suggested in several contexts that concrete resistance had to be led by the people involved, while his thought could at most offer tools for instituting these local resistances.

In our attempts to assess the possibility of a genealogical critique we must also take seriously the importance Foucault attached to the Enlightenment as an unsurpassed event in the history of Western thought and politics. His lecture 'What Is Critique?' (1978) began a series of interrogations on the meaning of the Enlightenment, and prepared the way for his definitive essay 'What Is Enlightenment?' (1984). The starting point of the essay is a short newspaper article written by Immanuel Kant in 1784 in response to the question, what is Enlightenment? According to Foucault, this seemingly minor text marked the discreet entry into the history of thought of a new form of philosophical reflection that was a permanent critique of our own era. It advocated the Enlightenment motto – 'dare to know' – a commitment to the free use of reason. While Habermas has remained deeply sceptical about Foucault's project, Foucault saw himself as sharing the same critical and historical form of thought as the

Frankfurt School. For him, the Enlightenment inaugurated a critical tradition of philosophy that 'from Hegel, through Nietzsche and Max Weber, to the Frankfurt School' founded the form of reflection in which he situated himself.<sup>37</sup>

The ideal of freedom as emancipation from the authoritative effects of power was an important part of Enlightenment thinking, and paved the way for the subsequent tradition of emancipatory politics exemplified by the French Revolution. Foucault, however, was notorious for his clear objection to the universalistic discourse of Enlightenment emancipation: there was no inherent human nature justifying the demands for human freedom and equality or guaranteeing the possibility of progress. Furthermore, Enlightenment humanism either incorporated masked forms of disciplinary power that operated to produce forms of modern individuality, or contributed to the domination of marginal groups and individuals. Consequently, the essay in which he located himself squarely within the Enlightenment tradition of philosophy and subscribed to its motto surprised many of his readers.

By linking his thought to the Enlightenment in his late essays, Foucault made the significant normative move of adopting the ideals associated with it – critical reason and personal autonomy – as the implicit ground on which his critiques of domination and abusive forms of power and reason rested. The Enlightenment ideals provided him with the historical – not universal and timeless – values on which to base his critiques. Unlike Kant, he endorsed freedom not as an abstract and universal ideal, but as an outcome of a certain historical development: historical and sociological facts. His philosophical critique of forms of domination and political rationality rests on the assumed desirability of freedom, but this ideal of freedom is not eternal and universal. It emerges from historically concrete and specific practices, and can only emerge from them. The championing of political freedom in the modern sense could not be found as such in any pre-Enlightenment tradition, but was

rather a product of a specific historical tradition of thought – the Enlightenment – of which we are part in any case.

Sharing the ideal of freedom means commitment to a historical tradition according to which we, today, in the West, think about human life and politics. Foucault does not advocate universal political programmes or make explicit moral judgements, but that does not mean that his analyses are uncritical. By exposing specific forms of political rationality and the corresponding forms of subjectivity as constraining, and at the same time as historically contingent, his analyses can be read as actively advocating political change in the direction of 'freedom'. Although such change must be understood in terms of local and partial transformations rather than universal political programmes, his thought is far from political nihilism. The analyses of our limits are analyses of freedom.

## 10

## PRACTICES OF THE SELF

As for what motivated me, it was quite simple; I would hope that in the eyes of some people it might be sufficient in itself. It was curiosity – the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself. After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeableness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower's straying afield of himself? There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all. People will say, perhaps, that these games with oneself would better be left backstage; or, at best, that they might properly form part of those preliminary exercises that are forgotten once they have served their purpose. But, then what is philosophy today – philosophical activity, I mean – if it is not the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself? In what does it consist, if not the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known? There is always something ludicrous in philosophical discourse when it tries, from the outside, to dictate to others, to tell them where their truth is and how to find it, or

when it works up a case against them in the language of naïve positivity. But it is entitled to explore what might be changed, in its own thought, through the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it. The 'essay' – which should be understood as the assay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes changes, and not as the simplistic appropriation of others for the purpose of communication – is the living substance of philosophy, at least if we assume that philosophy still is what it was in times past, i.e., an 'ascesis', askesis, an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought.

The studies that follow, like the others I have done previously, are studies of 'history' by reason of the domain they deal with and the references they appeal to; but they are not the work of a 'historian'. Which does not mean that they summarize or synthesize work done by others. Considered from the standpoint of their 'pragmatics', they are the record of a long and tentative exercise that needed to be revised and corrected again and again. It was a philosophical exercise. The object was to learn to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently.<sup>38</sup>

*The Use Of Pleasure*

Foucault died of AIDS on 25 May 1984 at the age of fifty-seven. A few days after his death, several hundred friends and admirers crowded into the courtyard outside the mortuary of the hospital to witness the removal of his coffin and to pay their last respects. The crowd was hushed as Foucault's old friend, the distinguished philosopher Gilles Deleuze, mounted a small box in the corner of the courtyard. In a voice barely audible and trembling with grief he began to read the above paragraphs. The text is from the preface to the last two volumes of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, one of the last texts he wrote. He had been working on these volumes all through his illness, and he had just managed to see them published before his untimely death.

The style of these last two books is very different from that of

his earlier work: it is strikingly plain – some would perhaps call it austere, some hurried. There are no dramatic emblems and no shocking images. The time period under study is also uncharacteristic of Foucault: while his other historical studies all focused on early modern and modern periods, his last books take a leap backwards to Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire. Such a complete change of direction in the academic world is risky. Foucault was not a specialist in classical thought and he must have known that he would be likely to make mistakes that would make him an easy target of criticism. Choosing a completely new direction would also disappoint the readers who expected to learn more about modern power. A lot must have been at stake for him personally: what he needed to know and wanted to say could not be done without a study of antiquity. It is against this background that we should read his words in the preface: 'After all, what would be the value of the passion for knowledge if it resulted only in a certain amount of knowledgeable-ness and not, in one way or another and to the extent possible, in the knower's straying afield of himself?'

*The History of Sexuality*, volumes 2 and 3, are concerned primarily with the sexual morality of Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire. The focus of the inquiry is on the manner in which sexuality constituted a moral domain and was problematized as a moral question – mainly by philosophers and doctors in texts written as guides for others. Volume 2, *The Use of Pleasure*, focused on the classical Greek culture of the fourth century BC, while the third volume, *The Care of the Self*, deals with the same issues in the Roman Empire of the first two centuries AD.

What emerges out of Foucault's historical studies of sexual morality is a particular conception of ethics that he traces to antiquity. He begins by making a distinction between morality as a moral code and morality of behaviour. The former refers to the set of values and rules of action that are taught to individuals by the church or the school, for example. By morality of behaviour, he refers to the effective behaviour of people in relation to the

code: how their actual behaviour matches the rules and values that are recommended to them. These components of sexual morality are studied through the history of morals and the social history of sexual practices respectively, but they are not the objects of Foucault's historical studies. There is still one important component of morality remaining, which he studies and calls ethics. Ethics refers to the manner in which one forms oneself as a subject of morality acting in reference to its prescriptive elements. It deals with the way in which moral rules are adopted and problematized by subjects. An individual could choose to follow the ethical rule of monogamy, for example, for a variety of reasons. He could follow it to set an example for others, to avoid punishment or to give his life moral beauty. He could also use different exercises to achieve this goal, such as memorization of scriptures, meditations or punishments.

The importance of a study of ethics becomes apparent when we try to make visible the difference between the morality of antiquity and that of Christianity. Foucault argues that, contrary to what is often believed, on the level of moral codes of behaviour, there are striking similarities between antiquity and Christianity. Although it is commonly supposed that the morality of antiquity was much more promiscuous and permissive because of its tolerance of homosexual relations, Foucault shows that both antiquity and Christianity attached a negative image to homosexual relations. Moreover, they both shared a concern, even fear, about the effect of sexual expenditure on an individual's health and valued conjugal fidelity and abstinence. What constitutes a strong contrast between these two cultures, however, is the way in which these moral ideals or demands are integrated in relation to the subject. The main emphasis in Christian morality is on the code, its systematicity, its richness, and its capacity to adjust to every possible case and to embrace every area of behaviour. The rules in Christian monasteries, for example, were not only very severe, but also extremely detailed. The morality of antiquity, on the other hand, represents a

morality in which the code and rules of behaviour are rudimentary. The ancient texts discussing morality lay down very few explicit rules or guidelines for the individual's behaviour. More important than the actual rules or contents of the law is the relationship that one has with oneself, the choice about the style of existence made by the individual (UP, 29–30).

Despite the similarities on the level of the code, the forms in which sexual behaviour are problematized are thus very different. In Ancient Greece, themes of sexual austerity were not an expression of deep or essential prohibition, but the elaboration and stylization of an activity. Morality was founded on a personal choice to live a beautiful life and to leave to others memories of a beautiful existence.

Despite the fact that *The History of Sexuality*, volumes 2 and 3, present us with a historical study of the forms of an ethical problematisation of a remote past, Foucault's focus, once again, is on the present. He admitted that he wrote these last two volumes from the perspective of a contemporary situation.<sup>39</sup> He denied, however, that he was suggesting that we adopt the ethics of Ancient Greece. He condemns outright the Ancient Greek ethics of sexuality in many ways as something quite disgusting, and refers to how it was linked to the ideas of a virile society, to dissymmetry, to the exclusion of the other and an obsession with penetration, for example.<sup>40</sup> Sexual relations in antiquity were not symmetrical, reciprocal or often even consensual. The active partner was a free man and the passive partner, usually a slave, a woman or a young boy, was not expected to derive any pleasure from the act. Yet, Foucault suggests there is something we can learn from ancient sexual ethics.

My idea is that it's not necessary to relate ethical problems to scientific knowledge. Among the cultural inventions of mankind there is a treasury of devices, techniques, ideas, procedures, and so on, that cannot exactly be reactivated but at least constitute, or help to constitute, a certain point of view which can be useful

as a tool for analyzing what is going on now – and to change it.  
(GE, 349–50.)

Morality was not related to religion or religious preoccupations in Ancient Greece, nor was it related to social, legal or institutional systems. Its domain was the relationship one had with oneself: the choice to give one's life moral beauty. What Foucault found striking was the similarity of the ethical problems with the problems of contemporary society.

I wonder if our problem is not, in a way, similar to this one, since most of us no longer believe that ethics is founded in religion, nor do we want a legal system to intervene in our moral, personal, private life. Recent liberation movements suffer from the fact that they cannot find any principle on which to base the elaboration of a new ethics. They need an ethics, but they cannot find any other ethics than an ethics founded on so-called scientific knowledge.  
(GE, 343.)

Foucault clearly points to the potential of ethics understood as a personal practice in our secular society. He argues that we have inherited the tradition of Christian morality with its values of self-renunciation and self-sacrifice, as well as the secular tradition that sees the basis for morality in external law. Against these traditions the practices of the self appear as immorality, egoism, or a means of escape from rules and responsibilities towards others. The practices of the self that he advocates should be understood as stemming from a whole different conception of ethics, however. Ethics refers to a creative activity, the permanent training of oneself by oneself.

Foucault's last two books should be read as an attempt to make a contribution to the task of rethinking ethics. They are also a continuation of his attempt to rethink the subject. Now the focus is on the forms of the self: the forms of understanding that the subject creates about him or herself and the practices by

which he or she transforms his/her mode of being. In his study of Ancient Greek ethics and the corresponding conception of the self, he clearly wanted to pursue his point that there was no true self that could be deciphered and emancipated, but that the self was something that had been – and must be – created. There is a whole new axis of analysis present in his late studies of the subject, however.

Foucault noted that he had perhaps insisted too much on the practices of domination and power, and that there was an analytical axis missing from his previous work. His analyses had to be complemented with a study of the practices of the self, modes of action that individuals exercised upon themselves. To be able to study the history of 'the experience of sexuality', he needed not only the methodological tools with which his archaeologies and genealogies had provided him, but also to 'study the modes according to which individuals are given to recognize themselves as sexual subjects' (UP, 5). He turned to studying the historical forms of understanding that subjects create about themselves, and the ways in which they form themselves as subjects of a morality. While his earlier genealogical studies investigated the ways in which power/knowledge networks constituted the subject, in his late work the emphasis is on the subject's own role in shaping him- or herself. It offers a more elaborate understanding of the subject than is found in his earlier writings.

In his late thinking Foucault returned to the notion, found in his early work, of the subversive role of art. He claimed that the ethical practices of the self were closely linked, or even fused, with aesthetics, and he called them *aesthetics of existence*. The process by which subjects form themselves as ethical subjects resembles the creation of a work of art. When asked what kind of ethics it was possible to build in our society, he replied:

... in our society, art has become something that is related only to objects and not to individuals or to life. That art is something which is specialized or done by experts who are artists. But

couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object but not our life? (GE, 350.)

This idea of creating oneself as a work of art has fuelled a lot of heated criticism of Foucault. He has been accused of retreating into amoral aesthetics and privileging an elitist notion of self-centred stylization. However, his aesthetics of existence should not be understood as a narcissistic enterprise, or as purely aesthetic in the narrow sense of visuality or of looking stylish. Foucault was very critical of the self-absorption and introspection characterizing our culture and pointed out that the ancient practices of the self were almost diametrically opposed to the present culture of the self. Our self-absorption derives from the idea that one must discover one's true self, to separate it from that which might obscure or alienate it and to decipher its truth thanks to psychological or psychoanalytical science. The Ancient Greeks were not trying to discover their inner truth, but to create themselves as worthy of respect, glory and power (GE, 362).

The emphasis on aesthetics thus does not mean that Foucault wanted us to make ourselves look beautiful. His idea was rather that we should relate to ourselves and to our lives as to something that was not simply given, but could be creatively formed and transformed. Rather than trying to discover the scientific truth about one's sexuality, for example, and then approximate the normal sexual behaviour of the appropriate gender and age group, one should shape one's sexual life creatively by imagining new kinds of relationships and ways of experiencing pleasure. Or rather than seeking a medical diagnosis that accounts for the way that one is or feels different, sometimes it might be better to embrace that difference instead and shape it creatively into a unique and empowering feature of one's being. The aim is not simply to discard all scientific knowledge concerning oneself, but to constantly question its domination. Resistance against normalizing power consists of creative practices of the self

as well as the critical interrogation of our present forms of thought.

Foucault's ethics as aesthetics was importantly a continuation of his concern with normalizing power. He did not believe that resistance could be situated outside the networks of power because to be a subject was only possible within them. Meaningful and effective actions were only possible in the power networks traversing society. While Foucault had insisted that resistance was always inherent in power as its irreducible counterpart, his account nevertheless left it open for the most part how, by what concrete means, subjects should form and instigate resistance. In his late thought he elaborated his understanding of resistance by insisting that subjects were not simply constructed by power, but that they themselves partook in that construction and could modify themselves through practices of the self. In other words, subjects are not just docile bodies, but actively refuse, adopt and alter forms of being a subject. One way of contesting normalizing power is by shaping oneself and one's lifestyle creatively: by exploring opportunities for new ways of being, new fields of experience, pleasures, relationships, modes of living and thinking.

The quest for freedom that characterizes Foucault's philosophy became, in his late thought, an attempt to develop and encourage ways of life that were capable of functioning as resistance to normalizing power. The aim is not self-stylization conducive to narcissism, but the proliferation of diversity and uniqueness. The important legacy of Foucault's thought lies not in telling us who or what we should be – upright citizens, beautiful and virtuous, sexually healthy and liberated – but in opening up spaces of freedom that make a singular way of life possible. Through reading him we are able to experience the world around us in radically new ways, and in the process become something different ourselves: subjects searching for ways of thinking, living and relating to other people that are perhaps currently still unimaginable.

## NOTES

The first date in the notes is that of first publication in French of the book/article referred to and the second date is the publication date of the English translation of which details are given in the note.

- 1 See James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993).
- 2 Michel Foucault 1986, 'Postscript, An Interview with Michel Foucault by Charles Ruas' in *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel*, trans. Charles Ruas (New York: Doubleday, 1986), p. 184.
- 3 *Suicides de prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), p. 51, trans. David Macey, quoted in David Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), p. 288.
- 4 Michel Foucault 1983, 'Critical Theory/Intellectual History', trans. Jeremy Harding, in *Michel Foucault, Politics, Philosophy, Culture, Interviews and Other Writings 1977-1984*, ed. Lawrence Kritzman (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 36-7.
- 5 See Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, p. 288.
- 6 Michel Foucault 1984, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2: *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 9.
- 7 See Ian Hacking, *Historical Ontology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
- 8 Michel Foucault 1961, *History of Madness*, trans. Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 8-11. Hereafter cited as HM.
- 9 Michel Foucault 1978, 'Interview with Michel Foucault' in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984*, vol. 3, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: New Press, 2000), p. 244. Hereafter cited as IMF.
- 10 Michel Foucault 1983, 'The Minimalist Self', in *Michel Foucault, Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, p. 6.
- 11 Michel Foucault 1961, 'La folie n'existe que dans une société', in *Dits et écrits, 1954-1975*, vol. 1, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), p. 197. Hereafter cited as DE.

- 12 Michel Foucault 1970, Foreword to the English edition of *The Order of Things* (London and New York, Routledge, 1994), pp. xiii–xiv. Hereafter cited as OT.
- 13 Paul Veyne 1971, 'Foucault Revolutionizes History', in Arnold I. Davidson (ed.), *Foucault and His Interlocutors* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 146–82.
- 14 Michel Foucault 1967, 'On the Ways of Writing History', trans. Robert Hurley in *Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, vol. 2, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: New Press, 1998), p. 286.
- 15 Michel Foucault 1963, 'What Is an Author?', trans. Josue V. Harari, in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp. 118–20.
- 16 Jean-Paul Sartre 1948, *What Is Literature?*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (London: Methuen, 1950), p. 45.
- 17 Foucault, *Death and the Labyrinth*, p. 175. Hereafter cited as DL.
- 18 Michel Foucault 1971, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, in *The Foucault Reader*, pp. 86–8. Hereafter cited as NGH.
- 19 See e.g. Michel Foucault, 'Prison Talk', trans. Colin Gordon in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980), p. 53–4.
- 20 Michel Foucault 1975, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 250. Hereafter cited as DP.
- 21 Foucault 1984, 'Foucault Michel, 1926–', trans. Catherine Porter, *Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 315. Hereafter cited as FM.
- 22 See Martin Saar, 'Genealogy and Subjectivity', *European Journal of Philosophy* 10: 2 (2002), 231–45.
- 23 See Martin Kusch, *Foucault's Strata and Fields. An Investigation into Archaeological and Genealogical Science Studies* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991), pp. 186–92.
- 24 Michel Foucault 1976, 'Questions of Geography', trans. Colin Gordon in *Power/Knowledge*, p. 69.
- 25 See Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, p. 335.
- 26 Michel Foucault 1984, 'What Is Called Punishing?', trans. Robert Hurley, in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, vol. 3, 2000, p. 383.
- 27 Michel Foucault 1976, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), pp. 94–6. Hereafter cited as HS.
- 28 Michel Foucault 1984, 'The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom', trans. J. D. Gauthier, in *The Final Foucault*, ed. James

- Bernauer and David Rasmussen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), p. 19. Hereafter cited as EPF.
- 29 Michel Foucault 1978, Introduction to *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth-Century French Hermaphrodite*, trans. Richard McDougall (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp. vii–x.
- 30 See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991).
- 31 See David Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 42.
- 32 Michel Foucault 1984, 'Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity' in *Ethics – Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, vol. 1, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: New Press, 1997), p. 163.
- 33 Michel Foucault 1990, 'What Is Critique?', trans. Lysa Hochroth, in *Foucault, The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth (New York: Semiotext(e), 1997), pp. 27–9.
- 34 *Sécurité, territoire, population* (1977–1978), *Security, Territory, Population – Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*. Trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and *Naissance de la biopolitique* (1978–1979), not yet available in English.
- 35 Michel Foucault 1979, 'Omnes et Singulatim: Toward a Critique of Political Reason', trans. P. E. Dauzat in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, vol. 3, 2000, p. 325.
- 36 Michel Foucault 1981, 'So Is It Important to Think?', trans. Robert Hurley in *Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, vol. 3, 2000, p. 456.
- 37 See e.g. Michel Foucault 1984, 'The Art of Telling the Truth', trans. Alan Sheridan in *Michel Foucault, Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, 1988, pp. 86–95.
- 38 Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2, *The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 8–9. Hereafter cited as UP.
- 39 Michel Foucault 1984, 'The Concern for Truth', trans. Alan Sheridan in *Michel Foucault, Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, 1988, p. 263.
- 40 Michel Foucault 1983, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress' in *The Foucault Reader*, p. 346. Hereafter cited as GE.

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1926** Paul-Michel Foucault is born on 15 October into a wealthy family in Poitiers, a small town in the countryside of France. Foucault's father, Paul, is a surgeon and a professor of anatomy at the medical school in Poitiers.
- 1930** Foucault begins school. He participates in the children's classes of the Lycée Henri-IV, a Jesuit school in Poitiers.
- 1936-40** Enrolls in the higher classes of the Lycée Henri-IV.
- 1940-45** Attends the Collège St Stanislas in Poitiers. Foucault is especially interested in history and receives excellent grades in the history of French literature and in Ancient Greek and Latin translation. In 1942 Foucault begins studying philosophy. Due to the war, several teachers are arrested by the Gestapo and Foucault receives private teaching in philosophy. He reads Henri Bergson, Plato, René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza and Immanuel Kant among others. He decides that he wants to study philosophy, not medicine, which is his father's plan for him.
- 1945** Attends the Lycée Henri-IV in Paris in order to prepare for the entrance exams to the École Normale Supérieure. Jean Hyppolite is Foucault's teacher in philosophy. His lectures on G.W.F. Hegel leave a strong impression on the young Foucault.
- 1946** Foucault is accepted at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. He attends a course on psychopathology and visits mental hospitals.
- 1947-8** Foucault attends the lectures of Maurice Merleau-Ponty at the École. The title of the lectures is 'The union of the body and soul in Malebranche, Maine de Biran and Bergson'. Merleau-Ponty also introduces his students to the works of Ferdinand de Saussure.
- 1948** Foucault receives *licence de philosophie* (permission to teach at school) from the École Normale Supérieure. He attends the Plato lectures of Louis Althusser. Foucault suffers from mental and emotional problems and attempts suicide. He is hospitalized in Sainte-Anne.

- 1949** Foucault becomes interested in existentialism and phenomenology. He begins to study German and the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. Through Heidegger Foucault becomes especially interested in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. When Jean Hyppolite gets appointed to the Sorbonne, Foucault begins to follow his lectures again. He receives *licence de psychologie* from the École Normale Supérieure.
- 1950** Influenced by Louis Althusser, Foucault joins the Communist Party. He grows more and more critical of G.W.F. Hegel's phenomenology and existentialism.
- 1951** Foucault receives *agrégation de philosophie* (permission to become a university lecturer) from the École Normale Supérieure. He begins teaching psychology at the École. Jacques Derrida among others attends Foucault's lectures. Like Althusser, Foucault takes his students to the Hôpital Sainte-Anne for educational visits.
- 1952** Receives *diplôme de psycho-pathologie* from the Institut de psychologie in Paris. Foucault starts translating Ludwig Binswanger's article 'Traum und Existenz' ('Dream and Existence') and writes a long introduction to the text. He reads Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Melanie Klein and Karl Jaspers in depth.
- 1952-5** Teaches psychology at the University of Lille. Foucault meets Gilles Deleuze for the first time.
- 1953** Foucault begins reading the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche in depth. He leaves the Communist Party.
- 1954** Publication of *Maladie mentale et personnalité* (*Mental Illness and Psychology*). Foucault participates in the lectures of Jacques Lacan at the Hôpital Sainte-Anne.
- 1955-8** Moves to Sweden. Teaches French culture and language at the University of Uppsala. Begins writing the *Histoire de la folie* (*History of Madness*). Foucault meets Roland Barthes for the first time. Barthes visits Foucault in Uppsala.
- 1958** Foucault leaves Sweden and becomes the director of the French Centre at the University of Warsaw, Poland.
- 1959** Foucault moves to Germany and becomes the director of the French Institute in Hamburg.
- 1960** Foucault returns to France and teaches philosophy and psychology at the University of Clermont-Ferrand. He meets Daniel Defert, a 23-year-old student from the École Normale Supérieure who becomes Foucault's partner for the rest of his life. Foucault's father dies.
- 1961** Receives *doctorat ès lettres* (permission to become a university

professor). Foucault's *thèse primaire* (primary thesis) is published as *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (*The History of Madness in the Classical Age*). His supervisor is Georges Canguilhem. Foucault's *thèse complémentaire* (complementary thesis) consists of a 128-page introduction and a translation of Immanuel Kant's *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*. The supervisor is Jean Hyppolite. Publication of *Histoire de la folie* (*History of Madness*). The book receives both positive and negative reviews.

**1962** Foucault is promoted to professor at the University of Clermont-Ferrand. Teaches philosophy and psychology until 1966. He holds lectures on themes that will later become his book *Les mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things*).

**1963** Publication of *Naissance de la clinique: une archéologie du regard médical* (*The Birth of the Clinic*) and Raymond Roussel (*Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel*). Foucault writes articles on Maurice Blanchot, Pierre Klossowski and Georges Bataille among others. *Naissance de la clinique* is received positively by Jacques Lacan, who discusses the book in his seminars.

**1965** Foucault visits Brazil for a period of two months and holds a lecture series in Sao Paulo.

**1965-6** Foucault distances himself more and more from the communists and the Marxists and participates in the planning of the Gaullist government's educational reforms. These awaken wide protests among student and teacher unions.

**1966** Publication of *Les mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things*). The book becomes a bestseller. Because of its criticism of phenomenology, Foucault becomes involved in a debate with Sartre that lasts for two years.

**1966-8** Foucault leaves France and becomes a visiting professor of philosophy at the University of Tunis in Tunisia. He lectures on aesthetics, history, psychology and the philosophy of language among other themes. He also lectures on Nietzsche and Descartes. Foucault invites Paul Ricoeur and Jean Hyppolite to hold visiting lectures at the university. Due to political instability in the country Foucault moves back to France before the end of his professorship.

**1968** Serves as a chairman of the philosophy department at the new experimental University of Paris VIII (Vincennes).

**1968-73** After his experiences of student political activism in Tunis, Foucault returns to leftist politics. He participates in radical activism and joins several street protests and signs petitions. He is

also arrested several times during demonstrations. Daniel Defert is attached to Maoist circles and influences Foucault's political views.

**1969** Foucault is elected to the Collège de France. He names his chair 'History of Systems of Thought'. Publication of *L'archéologie du savoir* (*The Archaeology of Knowledge*).

**1970** On 2 December, Foucault holds his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France.

**1970-83** Foucault holds his first lectures in the US and Japan. He makes regular visits to the US, and occasional visits to Brazil, Canada and Japan.

**1971** Foucault and Sartre meet in order to plan a demonstration against racism. A young Algerian had been shot to death by security guards.

**1971-3** Foucault and Daniel Defert found Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons (GIP), an organization for studying and improving the conditions of prisoners and prisons in France. Gilles Deleuze, Jean-Paul Sartre and Hélène Cixous among others join the group. GIP becomes a nationwide movement and several protests are organized and petitions signed. In 1972 Foucault visits the New York State prison in Attica, USA. He also participates actively in the campaigns against the death penalty.

**1975** Publication of *Surveiller et punir: naissance de le prison* (*Discipline and Punish*). Foucault joins the protests and petitions against the executions of political activists by Franco's fascist regime in Spain. He visits Madrid in order to join a press conference on the subject. He also organizes a demonstration outside the Spanish embassy in Paris.

**1976** Publication of *Histoire de la sexualité 1: La volonté de savoir* (*The History of Sexuality*, volume 1: *The Will to Knowledge*).

**1978** Foucault works as a journalist and writes several articles and reports on the Iranian revolution for the Italian magazine *Corriere della sera*.

**1981** Foucault and Pierre Bordieu write a petition in support of the Solidarity movement in Poland.

**1983** Foucault teaches at the University of California, Berkeley, the beginning of a permanent visiting appointment.

**1984** Publication of *Histoire de la sexualité 2: L'usage des plaisirs* and *Histoire de la sexualité 3: Le souci de soi* (*The History of Sexuality*, volumes 2 and 3: *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*). Foucault's health declines and he is hospitalized. According to his

friend Paul Veyne and his partner Daniel Defert, Foucault knew he had AIDS, but did not want his friends to know about it.

**1984** Foucault dies in Paris on 25 June at the age of fifty-seven. Daniel Defert founds the first French AIDS-awareness organization AIDES.

**1994** *Dits et écrits* (the collection of all Michel Foucault's work in addition to his monographs) is published.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

### Primary texts

Apart from the works discussed in this book, there exist the following books by Foucault which have all been translated into English.

*Maladie mentale et personnalité*. Paris: PUF, 1954. Revised as *Maladie mentale et psychologie*. Paris: PUF, 1962. (*Mental Illness and Psychology*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.)

*Naissance de la clinique: une archéologie du regard médical*. Paris: PUF, 1963. (*The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*. Trans. A. M. Sheridan-Smith. London: Routledge, 1976.)

*L'archéologie du savoir*. Paris: Gallimard, 1969. (*The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. A. M. Sheridan-Smith. London: Routledge, 1972.)

*Ceci n'est pas une pipe: deux lettres et quatre dessins de René Magritte*. Montpellier: Fata Morgana. (*This Is Not a Pipe*. Trans. and ed. James Harkness. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983.)

*Histoire de la sexualité, 3: Le souci de soi*. Paris: Gallimard, 1984. (*The History of Sexuality, Vol. 3: The Care of the Self*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Random House, 1986.)

Almost all of Foucault's interviews, essays and articles have been collected in *Dits et écrits*, vols. 1–4, 1954–1988, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald. Paris: Gallimard, 1994.

All of his lectures at the Collège de France will be published by Gallimard/Seuil. They will be translated into English in a thirteen-volume edition edited by Arnold Davidson. So far the following six French volumes and five English translations have been published:

*Le pouvoir psychiatrique: cours au Collège de France (1973–1974)*. Paris: Gallimard, 2003. (*Psychiatric Power – Lectures at the Collège de France*,

1973–1974. Trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.)

*Les anormaux: cours au Collège de France (1974–1975)*. Paris: Seuil, 1999. (*Abnormal – Lectures at the Collège de France, 1974–1975*. Trans. Graham Burchell. Eds. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana. New York: Picador, 2004.)

*Il faut défendre la société: cours au Collège de France (1976–1977)*. Paris: Gallimard, 1997. (*Society Must Be Defended – Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*. Trans. David Macey. Eds. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana. New York: Picador, 2003.)

*Sécurité, territoire, population: cours au Collège de France (1977–1978)*. Paris: Gallimard, 2004. (*Security, Territory, Population – Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978*. Trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.)

*Naissance de la biopolitique: cours au Collège de France (1978–1979)*. Paris: Gallimard, 2004. (Not yet available in English.)

*L'herméneutique du sujet: cours au Collège de France (1981–1982)*. Ed. Frédéric Gros. Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2001. (*The Hermeneutics of the Subject – Lectures at the Collège de France 1981–1982*. Trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Picador, 2005.)

### Biographies

There are three full-length biographies of Foucault:

Eribon, Didier *Michel Foucault*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989.

Macey, David *The Lives of Michel Foucault*. London: Vintage, 1993.

Miller, James *The Passion of Michel Foucault*. Cambridge, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993.

### Collections of Articles on Foucault

Davidson, Arnold I. (ed.), *Foucault and His Interlocutors*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Gutting, Gary (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, 2nd edn. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Hoy, David Couzens (ed.), *Foucault: A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1986.

Moss, Jeremy (ed.), *The Later Foucault: Politics and Philosophy*. London: Sage, 1998.

Smart, Barry (ed.), *Michel Foucault: Critical Assessments*, vols. 1–3. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

Waldenfels, Bernard and Ewald, François (eds.), *Spiele der Wahrheit*.

*Michel Foucaults Denken*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991.

### General References

Dreyfus, Hubert and Rabinow, Paul *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. University of Chicago Press, 1982.

Flynn, Thomas *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason*, vol. 2: *A Poststructuralist Mapping of History*. University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Han, Beatrice *Foucault's Critical Project. Between the Transcendental and the Historical*. Stanford University Press, 1998.

May, Todd *The Philosophy of Foucault*. Stocksfield: Acumen Publishing, 2006.

Oksala, Johanna *Foucault on Freedom*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Rajchman, John *Michel Foucault: The Freedom of Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

### On Archaeology and Genealogy

Gutting, Gary *Michel Foucault's Archaeology of Scientific Reason*. Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Kusch, Martin *Foucault's Strata and Fields: An Investigation into Archaeological and Genealogical Science Studies*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991.

Saar, Martin *Genealogie als Kritik. Geschichte und Theorie des Subjekts nach Nietzsche und Foucault*. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2007.

Visker, Rudi *Michel Foucault – Genealogy as Critique*. Trans. Chris Turner. New York: Verso, 1990.

### On Governmentality

Barry, Andrew, Osborne, Thomas and Rose, Nicholas (eds.), *Foucault and Political Reason. Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism and Rationalities of Government*. London: UCL Press, 1996.

Burchell, Graham et al. (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality. With Two Lectures by and One Interview with Michel Foucault*. University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Dean, Mitchell *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*. London: Sage, 1999.

Lemke, Thomas *Eine Kritik der politischen Vernunft – Foucaults Analyse der modernen Gouvernementalität*. Berlin/Hamburg: Argument, 1997.

### On Gender and Sexuality Studies

Diamond, I. and Quinby, L. (eds.), *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1988.

Halperin, David M. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Hekman, Susan J. (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault*. Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996.

McNay, Lois *Foucault and Feminism: Power, Gender and the Self*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.

McWhorter, Ladelle *Bodies and Pleasure: Foucault and the Politics of Sexual Normalization*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

Sawicki, Jana *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power and the Body*. New York: Routledge, 1991.

### On Ancient Ethics

Detel, Wolfgang *Foucault and Classical Antiquity: Power, Ethics and Knowledge*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.

O'Leary, Timothy *Foucault and the Art of Ethics*. London: Continuum, 2002.

### Web Resources

<http://www.michel-foucault.com/> The website of Foucault Resources, a good information source on Foucault's life and works, recent publications and current events on Foucault.

<http://www.siu.edu/~foucault/> The website of the Foucault Circle, a worldwide network of scholars and educators who share an interest in the thought of Foucault.

<http://www.foucaultsociety.org/> The website of the Foucault Society, an interdisciplinary society for scholars, students, activists and artists who are interested in studying and applying Foucault's ideas within a contemporary context.

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